The Shoreless Sea

Mollie Panter-Downes

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THE SHORELESS SEA

BY

MOLLIE PANTER-DOWNES

"Fate is a sea without shore."

Swinburne

"Many waters cannot quench Love,
Neither can the floods drown it . . .
For Love is strong as Death—"

The Song of Solomon

G. P. Putnam's Sons
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G. P. Putnam's Sons

Made in the United States of America

Dedicated to

MY DARLING DADDY

MAJOR EDWARD MARTIN PANTER-DOWNES

AND

HIS BROTHER OFFICERS AND MEN

OF THE 2ND BATTALION ROYAL IRISH REGIMENT

WHO FELL AT THE BATTLE OF MONS

AUGUST, 1914

* * *

". . . You've leapt the golden stile,
And wave beyond the stars that all is well . . .
And we may know that it is well with you,
Among the chosen few,
Among the very brave, the very true."

MAURICE BARING.

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THE SHORELESS SEA

PART I

ESCAPE

CHAPTER I

DEIRDRE AND GUY

I

THE sunlight flickered through the leaves and blossoms of a fruit tree outside the window, making grotesque shadows that danced on the pale grey walls. Dimly there floated up through the open window the sound of Olivia practising, with the loud pedal down, in the drawing-room. From the direction of the orchard came the ring of voices—Howard's raised angrily, and then Roly's shriller tones. The woman in the bed closed her eyes fretfully, and frowned.

It was a wonderful bed—all gilt mouldings and delicate spirals, with four fat, rose-wreathed cherubs who, in the tips of their plump fingers, upheld a canopy of pale green silk. A wonderful bed but not more wonderful than the woman who lay back with closed eyes on its lace-edged pillows. She seemed to fit in with the old French bed—its flowery, simpering cupids, its elegant curves. One could imagine a fine lady—a Madame Pompadour, perhaps, or a Du Barry—lying in it drinking her chocolate of a morning, or, charmingly be-wigged and be-rouged, receiving her

friends and adorers. Here, then, was her modern counterpart, and surely no fairer or finer lady had ever slept beneath the pale green canopy.

Cynthia Bellamy was forty, but in a kindly light and charming surroundings she managed to look a girl in her twenties. She made a delightful picture lying there, and at the back of her mind she was comfortably, serenely conscious of it, like a cat basking in the warmth of the sun. She shifted a little on her pillows, so as to avoid creasing the skin beneath her chin. She was inordinately proud of her chin, although worried about a sort of looseness which was beginning to show at the sides; also of her skin, which, under hours of daily massaging and creaming, had retained the warm apricot bloom and softness of its first beauty. Over her nightgown of finest lawn and lace she wore a loose *peignoir*—a thing of palest rose satin and soft swansdown, which, as she was well aware, became her vastly. A dainty white wicker tray lay on the little table beside her, cheek by jowl with a cut-glass bottle of eau-de-Cologne, and a French novel in a yellow paper cover. Scattered all over the lace and satin counterpane was the morning's correspondence—a bill from her dressmaker's (perhaps that explained the frown), an invitation or two, and a letter from her married sister. A little breeze that roamed in at the open window blew one of the letters off the bed—it lay like a pale mauve leaf on the grey carpet.

Just for a space content returned to Mrs. Bellamy's mind. Remembering that frowning tended to bring lines, and wrinkles, she composed her face to a charm-

ing placidity. Soothing thoughts laid cool hands over her jangled nerves. There was a new frock that Madeline had promised she should have without fail to-day. It was intended for the Liscarneys' garden-party on Thursday. As Mrs. Bellamy thought of it she smiled—a little, sleek, contented smile that was almost a purr. Clothes were her god. She was a clever woman, and upon her clothes she lavished the full powers of concentration and thought that she possessed—line, colour, texture—each of these she studied inside out. In her own way she was an artist, having the true creative instinct, and eye for a subtle or bizarre blending of colours.

This particular creation was to be pale green—she had discovered that this shade brought out the tawny glints in her thick hair and the dark softness of her fine eyes—the simplest, demurest, most artfully artless thing that could be seen. With it was to go a floppy, fine straw hat, lined with the exact shade of faintest pink which should cast a becoming glow over her skin——

She closed her eyes again, pleasantly soothed. Peace pervaded her soul. She began to plan a creation for a new tea-gown—she fancied something filmy and black—with perhaps a bizarre touch of mandarin blue to give an unexpected shock—like a jazz band playing in Westminster Abbey——

Suddenly and rudely her peace was shattered—the voices from the orchard had ceased, but now they rang out again close at hand. A skurrying of feet, scraping on the gravel outside her window, Roly's

voice whooping in triumph and derision, Howard's uplifted in execration—"You little brute! You young devil! Wait till I catch you, that's all! Gimme my mashie—d'you hear?" The sounds of a scuffle and then a yell from Roly. At the same time Olivia from the drawing-room started to play the scale of E major, leaving out the G sharp. It was more than Mrs. Bellamy could stand.

She stretched out her hand and rang the bell for her maid. She rang twice, sharply, and then, her mouth folding tightly, a third time without result. But just as her hand was stretching out for the fourth time the door opened, and Deirdre Bellamy came in.

It was hard to realize that the woman in the gilt bed was the mother of this tall young creature. Mrs. Bellamy herself refused to remember the fact, and, save for a few minutes a day, seldom saw her. Certainly no love was lost between these two—there was no strong tie between Cynthia Bellamy and any one of her children. Roly was her favourite—with his face clean he was anyway picturesque, and he was only eight. Whereas Deirdre was seventeen—ridiculous. Mrs. Bellamy, replying on one occasion to a weak and feeble protest from her husband, had said: "Oh yes, I know that I ought to take her round with me, but I should look absurd with a great gawky girl to drag about. Beside, she's quite happy at home, and she looks after Roly for me." Whereat Mr. Bellamy had given in, as he always did, and Deirdre had continued to fulfill the rôle of unpaid nursery governess.

As she advanced slowly forward, two thoughts

struck Mrs. Bellamy simultaneously, like two well-aimed blows. One was, "She's growing up." One other was, "She's beautiful." It seemed as if she had never really seen her daughter until that minute, and she was literally staggered by what she saw.

Deirdre Bellamy was tall and almost boyishly slender. Her old, shabby, over-short cotton frock revealed long, slender legs, and round, sun-burnt arms, the tan of which caused her mother an inward shudder. She had a long, swinging plait of lustreless, dead black hair, having in it none of Mrs. Bellamy's glancing red lights, and a flawless, warm white skin, that seemed to have the smooth, matt surface of a magnolia petal. The mouth was large but finely cut, with delicate, rather disdainfully arched red lips. But it was the eyes which gave life and beauty to the strangely arresting young face. Set beneath arched black brows they were wide apart and long in shape, in colour an extraordinarily clear, translucent green, that with the black lashes and clear white skin, produced an almost startling effect. They were like twin lakes, in whose clear green depths glimmered a single drowned star—

Mrs. Bellamy was startled. She also experienced a keen, absurd, raging anger. She sat up in bed, sending all the letters on the counterpane in a fluttering shower to the carpet.

"Where's Marie?" she asked fretfully. "I rang three times and she never came."

"I don't know," said Deirdre tranquilly. "Do you want anything?"

She advanced to the foot of the bed, and stood

looking at her mother, taking in everything—the dainty lace cap on the dark head, the furious dark eyes. She also noted, with the careless cruelty inseparable from Youth that two deep lines were beginning to show on either side of the beautiful mouth. Cynthia Bellamy felt the intense gaze and said crossly:

"For heaven's sake don't stare at me like that! Don't you know that it's rude to stare?"

Deirdre calmly looked away—she was used to her mother's fluctuating moods. She cast an appreciative glance round the bedroom. On the rare—usually stolen—occasions that she entered her mother's room, she never failed to feast her beauty-loving little soul upon the wonders of it, its pale grey walls and carpet, spring-green hangings, and, most intriguing of all, the old gilt bed with its almost apologetic air of past glories, its fat cupids, its faint fragrance of patchouli and powder, the click of little red heels, and the rustle of silk. . . . The sunlight glanced on the tortoiseshell and gold fittings of the big dressing-table, and touched a crystal bowl of forget-me-nots with a golden finger. A scarlet kimono flung over a chair lay like a pool of blood on the carpet.

Deirdre gazed hungrily about her. With all her heart she adored beauty—of line, of colour, of sound. She had a half-sensual craving for colours—warm oranges and passionate scarlets that made something in her stir queerly in response, or the gentler, subtler tones of lilac or old rose or deep, translucent green like the depths of a still lake. Once, as a child, she had stolen into her mother's green and gilt room and

opened the door of the huge wardrobe with its great plate-glass door. In it had hung what seemed to her startled and admiring eyes, a very rainbow of dresses —delicate gauzy things that looked for all the world like a bed of Spring hyacinths. She had touched them all with small, reverent fingers—the rose and cloudy blue and delicate yellow things, all diffusing a faint perfume of violets. There had been one—a black ball-gown, shimmering like the skin of a serpent, that appealed to her strange little soul more than the others. She had actually kissed it in her rapture, it seemed to her such a beautiful thing. And then Marie had come in and caught her. Deirdre hated Marie. She had such a bad-tempered mouth and bony hands that slapped horribly hard. However, it had been worth it—seeing and touching those hyacinth-flowery garments, and the glittering scales of that black serpent gown. It all came back to her as she stood there, looking at the big wardrobe. She could see herself, a small, half-defiant, half-guilty figure with parted, adoring lips and oddly unchildlike eyes that surveyed the angry Frenchwoman with a sort of suave, veiled insolence in their translucent depths.

Mrs. Bellamy's voice broke in sharply on her dreams:

"Tell Olivia to stop her practising at once—it sets my nerves all on edge. And what a dreadful noise Howard and Roland are making in the garden! I wish you would keep them quiet at this hour in the morning."

Deirdre looked at her mother with the quiet, clear-

eyed gaze that, Mrs. Bellamy always felt angrily, veiled a kind of amused contempt.

"Miss Melsey is coming to-day, so Olivia has to practise. And Roly has taken Howard's pet mashie, so Howard is chasing him."

"What an absurd fuss to make about a stupid golf club! And Howard was swearing dreadfully—please speak to him about it, Deirdre. His ways are really dreadful. You must take Olivia for a walk, or something. Anyway, keep her quiet—that's all I ask."

There was a note of dismissal in her petulant voice, but Deirdre did not go. She strolled carelessly over to the window and looked out. The sun made her clear white skin look like old ivory. Then she turned and faced her mother.

"I want a pair of new shoes," she said suddenly and unexpectedly.

Mrs. Bellamy felt another shock that was distinctly unpleasant. To-day she had seen and heard Deirdre properly for the first time for years. She said, almost helplessly, so great was her surprise:

"Haven't you got any?"

Deirdre stuck out a slender foot in a shabby, clumsy shoe that almost hid and deformed its natural narrow lines and arched curves.

"These old things," she said briefly. Her eyes roamed to a pair of Cynthia's own shoes flung carelessly on the floor—dainty, beautifully cut bronze things with high heels and small, chased buckles. "I want a pair like that!" she announced, pointing with one slim brown finger.

Mrs. Bellamy raised herself a little higher on her piled pillows and stared at the amazing young thing who was her daughter. A frown creased her white forehead and puckered the black brows.

"Like that! Nonsense! You're only a child!"

Deirdre said, quite simply and tonelessly:

"I'm over seventeen." She came to the foot of the bed and rested a hand on one of the gilt posts.

Mother and daughter stared at each other. Deirdre's strange eyes were tranquil and a little amused. Only her round young chin was set firmly, and her mouth was folded into a tight red bud. Astonishment was in Cynthia's gaze, that made place for fury, and something else that was not pleasant to see. Her beautiful mouth started to twitch a little. They stared for a long, a palpitating, a psychological moment. And both felt that it was war between them. Then Cynthia laughed—a shrill, even harsh laugh that was almost ugly.

"So that's why you came in, is it? To grumble about your shoes, and try and get a new pair out of me? You horrid, ungrateful girl! Instead of packing you off to boarding-school as any other mother in her senses would have done, I let you stay at home and do what you like. All the gratitude I get is that you grumble about your clothes and shoes, and let the children make a horrible noise in the morning! Don't look at me like that! You won't get a pair of new shoes—those are perfectly good, and you must wear them until they wear out! Now go—leave the room! Oh, my head—my poor nerves!"

She was raving—vulgarly, blindly raving, the words pouring out of her mouth in a harsh, shrill voice that at times rose almost to a scream. She knew that she was losing her dignity, but she could not stop herself. She had actually sat up in bed, and was leaning forward with her face distorted, her lips twisted, her eyes glittering and narrowed. She repeated again, with a voice that shook and shrilled: "Go! Leave the room —*at once!*" But Deirdre did not go. Instead she smiled—a cold little smile of such subtle insolence that her mother paused, panting, staring with furious, unshamedly hating eyes. In that smile she seemed to see herself, all the tissues of breeding and languor swept away, ranting and raving like a Billingsgate fishwife—and it was not a pleasant sight by any means.

Deirdre started to speak in an absolutely detached, impersonal voice:

"I've been waiting for this opportunity for some time—thank goodness I can speak at last! Look here, I've stood this sort of thing all my life, but I'm fed up at last. It's only lately that it's dawned upon me that there might be some girls who didn't act as an unpaid nursery maid, and have to wear ugly, common old clothes and boots, and never have a friend to talk to ever. I suppose there *are* some girls of my age who actually have good times, and go to dances and things, and wear pretty clothes. Well, *I* shall!"

"Stop!" said Cynthia harshly. "Stop! Do you hear me?"

Deirdre never moved—her green eyes between their black silky lashes were inscrutable.

"I shall not stop until I have finished. I shall be eighteen in June—the time when most girls come out. You won't bring me out, I know—but Auntie Vi will —you know she will. You hate me, and I'm sorry. It must be rather decent having a real mother to love one. You didn't like me when I was small, and you hate me now. You would like to keep me in the nursery always, badly dressed and kept carefully out of visitors' ways. I don't believe half a dozen people know that you have a daughter of seventeen. I suppose with all the money you spend on yourself and your clothes and your entertaining that you can't manage to keep me and the rest of us decently dressed. We're dressed worse than poor children—all of us except Howard, who of course has to be properly turned out for Harrow. Father doesn't say anything—poor Father, he's weak as water. *But I'm not!* I'm grown up now, and I intend to do what I want! You may try to stop me, but you won't—you can't! I'm cleverer than you are, and I shall beat you! I shall be young for the first time in my life, and laugh a lot! Oh, I shall get out—I shall get out!"

She made a sweeping movement of her hands, as if breaking invisible bonds, or throwing open the long-shut gates into happiness. Suddenly she laughed—a high, clear pipe of young mirth like that of a blackbird flying through the April woods.

Mrs. Bellamy sank back among her pillows as if stunned. She had heard the girl's speech with the sickening knowledge in her heart that every word of it was true. But her rage had mounted, becoming

almost terrible in its intensity. One of her white, beautiful hands plucked restlessly at the lace and satin coverlet. She stared at the girl at the foot of the bed, who looked back at her with oddly unmoved green eyes, and laughed with back-thrown head and triumphant mouth—stared at her with a twitching mouth and something almost like fear in her heart. For every line of throat and mouth and chin spoke of defiance, of exulting, rather terrible triumph. Mrs. Bellamy suddenly felt old—dreadfully old. Youth was clamouring at her gates, defying her, demanding its rights, its long-withheld rights. She felt anger and fear, and something that was neither, but the faint wraith of regret that this beautiful creature who was her daughter should stand before her, and fling terrible words in her face that were true—horribly true. It was only a wraith of regret for the beautiful things that might have been, but it stirred for a second, like a small stab of pain. Then it was gone, and she lay there staring—staring dumbly at this girl who had said in such a calm, unmoved, dispassionate voice—"You hate me——"

Deirdre suddenly moved away, walking across the big room with the careless, half audacious swing of an athletic boy. At the door she paused and half turned, a something that was almost pity in her face. She had seen the old tired look drag at the beautiful face, the sudden fear leap into dark eyes. But Mrs. Bellamy gave no sign or sound, so she went out, shutting the door very gently behind her.

And that was the strange scene played out between

mother and daughter that April morning, in the big room with its gilt, cherub-decked, brocade-hung French bed

* * * * *

Deirdre went slowly downstairs, elation in her step, gladness in the set of her young head with its long, swinging black plait. She knew that there were many battles in front of her before she got what she wanted, but at last she and her mother knew where they stood. And she had a glowing sensation that the victory of their first skirmish lay with her. She was absolutely without compunction except for that one pitying glance of hers. She did not care how she hurt, or wounded, or trampled upon as long as she got out of the rut into the magic, intoxicating kingdom of Life. Deirdre did not hate her mother—she did not think her worth hating. But she despised her for all her little petty ways, for her dread of appearing old, for her way of losing her dignity and raving with shrill voice and twisted lips. She was so small in her outlooks and aims, this woman who none of them—not even Roly, the baby of the family—called "Mother"; Clothes and Money and Pleasure were her triple gods. Her house was perfectly furnished and managed, but her children ran wild, badly dressed, uncared for. Mr. Bellamy lacked the character or will to protest, beyond an occasional mild suggestion which his wife—if she listened to it at all—swept out of her path and mind as she always did anything of his. The extraordinary part was that he still hopelessly loved her.

He was a mild, easy-going man, in appearance

comically like Tenniel's pictures of the Mad Hatter, an illusion he assisted by wearing very high collars and letting his hair grow long. He was the senior partner of a large publishing firm, and went up every morning to London, returning by an evening train. Letting his wife have a liberal allowance, and entertain as much as she liked, he had only once in his life put down his foot over anything. That was when Mrs. Bellamy wanted to live in town. But Mr. Bellamy flatly and for once stubbornly refused. He was the sort of man who likes to have a garden in which to smoke a pipe on summer evenings and to walk round admiring the roses and vegetable marrows. He would have been ideally happy in a small cottage with an acre or two of ground to play with, and none of the guests who, to his secret loathing, filled the house at every hour of the day. A domesticated man, this Bellamy; hearth-and-home-loving, out of place in the gay throng who whirled like giddy, vivid moths around the candle of his beautiful wife. Still, he said nothing, for the simple reason that he loved her, and was a simple soul who loathed anything in the nature of a scene.

Mrs. Bellamy, not being able to live in town, contented herself with a large house on the petticoats, as it were, of a small but busy and fashionable old Sussex town. She soon became the acknowledged queen of Bamberly society, and contented herself with frequent visits to London—absences which were looked forward to, by the way, with great longing by the entire family —except, of course, Mr. Bellamy.

Deirdre and the rest rather liked Bamberly. The

town itself was straggling and old-fashioned, and it was tucked away in one of the most beautiful parts of Sussex. There were places in Deirdre's strange soul which called out for the woods and lanes and high, silent places. She liked to get away from the others for hours by herself, spent in long, idle dreamings, lying among the bluebells staring up at the pale sky peeping through the branches. But lately she had revolted against her life. She had seen herself one morning in the glass—pale, elfin face, flower-red mouth, clear jade eyes that brooded and dreamed, half veiled by the black lashes—and she had realized with a sudden pang that was not vanity or even pleasure, but a kind of naïve wonder, that she was beautiful. And Life called to her, held out warm, welcoming arms and claimed her as her child. Hence the strange pent-up outburst of the morning, and that odd, yet definite sense of a first victory.

From the direction of the drawing-room came, fortissimo, the "Jolly Peasant," crashing forth from under Olivia's heavy fingers. As Deirdre opened the door she swung round on the piano-stool with antagonism in her gaze, which faded as she saw her sister.

II

Olivia was much more like her mother than any of the others. She was fourteen, long-legged and armed with a short, boyish crop of black curls, and a pale-skinned, sullen face, which, however, could be entirely transformed by a singularly charming smile, which she bestowed only upon a favoured few. Her temper was

extremely violent—perhaps that accounted for the reddish gleam in the dark eyes. Unlike Deirdre, Olivia hated her mother.

Horrible words to write, but they were true. After all, what cause had she to do otherwise? To her, "Mother" merely meant a beautifully dressed vision who floated into her ken perhaps once a week, and was possessed of a temper fully as violent as her own. When they did come in contact with each other it usually ended in Olivia being sent to bed supperless —departing with a shower of abuse on her lips, and her curly head high in the air. But she was loyal to the few she loved—this strange, keen-tongued, hot-tempered little person. And chief among those was Deirdre.

She swung round now, dangling a long leg whose black stocking exhibited to the world a large hole on the knee. Her pink cotton dress was faded and badly made, much too short in arms and skirt, and stained all down the front with bicycle oil. A jagged rent at the waistband was clumsily fastened by a large and conspicuous black safety-pin that held together its yawning mouth. Deirdre's quick eyes took in all this, and her mouth hardened—she was remembering the pink and swansdown vision in the gilt bed upstairs who would presently think of getting up and choosing a beautiful dress for the day out of the many beautiful dresses in that plate-glass wardrobe. The mother—and then the daughter, untidy, badly dressed, uncared for—— She said to her sister:

"Stop your practising now, Livvy. We'll go for a

walk—over to Gilly's Farm. P'raps Howard will come."

Olivia's smile vanished, and her mouth grew sullen.

"I suppose," she said slowly, "that *She*"—the children never spoke of "Mother"—"told you to s-stop me?"

Olivia stammered badly, but especially so in moments of excitement and anger. When she came to a word which eluded her, she would wrinkle her *retroussé* nose in the funniest way imaginable, and finally bring it out with a little "Plop!" of triumph.

"Yes—you'd better stop—I've just had a row with Her, and your 'Jolly Peasant' would be the last straw."

Olivia's eyes suddenly blazed.

"Well, I-let it be!" she cried. "D-damn Her! *Let* it be!"

And swinging furiously round again, she started banging out, with the right foot firmly glued on to the pedal, the excruciating finish of the "Peasant."

Deirdre's cool voice came to Olivia's ears even through the noise.

"Do shut up, Livvy. And at once, please." There was a note in her calm voice which even Olivia obeyed at times. So the pianist suspended an agonizing crash of discords to slam down the piano-lid, slip sulkily off the stool and march to the door, followed by her sister's: "Get your hat and come on. And you might wash your hands first, old dear."

Left by herself, Deirdre looked rapidly round the big, dim flower-filled drawing-room—forbidden Paradise except for the purpose of practising on the big

grand piano. (The old schoolroom instrument having, under a succession of strumming fingers, long since given up the ghost.) It was at the grand piano that Deirdre looked—longingly, and with a covetous eye. She had a musical soul, and Olivia's strummings were real agony to her. Once, years ago, a great pianist had stayed at Green Gables, and had played one night after dinner. Deirdre remembered creeping downstairs and huddling, a small, shivering nightgowned figure, outside the door, listening with chattering teeth, a blue nose, and ecstasy in her soul to the delicate laughter of Chopin, to strange, wild, disturbing Hungarian dances, and plaintive, oddly wistful Russian folk-songs——

That was long ago, but she remembered it as a glimpse into a bewildering new world. Since then she had discovered that she had a voice which, although not at all strong, was remarkably sweet and true. She sang as a bird does, without effort and solely for her own delight, or when she was feeling happy. And on rare, stolen occasions—when Mrs. Bellamy was out or away—she slipped into the drawing-room and spent hours singing, and playing all the accompaniments which were not too difficult for her. Of course it was a secret—no one knew except the Family, and it was safe with them.

Deirdre went into the garden through the big conservatory that opened out of the drawing-room, warm and pleasant with its banks of greenery and the scent of the demure, dumpy pink and blue hyacinths that were ranged on the shelves in earthenware pots. Outside she was joined by Olivia, swinging by its elastic

an enormous and battered straw hat, a very ancient friend known to the Family as the Mushroom. It did not belong to anyone in particular, but they wore it in turns if they could not lay hands on their own head-gear. It hung on a peg to itself in the lobby, and Deirdre, or Olivia, or even Roly would snatch it up and clap it on their heads, if they were in a hurry and wanted a hat. Olivia put it on, and it completely swamped her, like a very large extinguisher over a small candle, but she pushed it back from her face and grinned at Deirdre, all her ill-temper forgotten, showing a row of very white, pointed teeth like a squirrel's, or some other little animal's.

"Come on," she said amiably. "H-Howard and Roly are s-somewhere in the orchard, I think. Did you hear the row they were making? Did *She* hear?"

"Yes, She did," said Deirdre shortly. "And She was awfully mad. She pitched into me, *I* can tell you!"

"D-d-did She?" stammered Olivia, her eyes glittering. "The old beast! The p-p-p-p——" She twisted her large pink mouth into an extraordinary shape, and managed to bring out with a pop! like a champagne cork being drawn—"Pig!"

It was characteristic of the attitude of the Family towards their mother that Deirdre seemed in no way surprised or shocked by this outburst. Instead, she cordially agreed.

"Yes, She is," she said. "But on the whole I think I managed to get one up on Her. Hulloa, there's Howard and Roly!"

Howard and Roland Bellamy came arm-in-arm up

the flower-bordered path at the end of which was the little white wicket that led to the large orchard. It was hard to believe that half an hour ago these two had been indulging in a hot skirmish outside Mrs. Bellamy's window. Indeed the only trace of it was an angry flush that still burnt under Howard's skin and a certain dishevelment of hair and person about Roly's small and never too tidy ensemble. But the Bellamy temper was always one that flared up to Olympian heights for one brief, heated moment, and the next was forgotten. Olivia and Roly had been known to have a fight in the garden, rolling on the path biting each other, kicking and cursing with equal gusto, and the next minute with their arms round each other's necks, engaged in amiable, even loving converse. Theirs was a combination of Southern and Irish temperament—hot-blooded and tempestuous, but quickly forgiving. Observe Howard and his small brother, the latter carelessly swinging the mashie, cause of all the excitement!

Howard was a tall handsome boy of nearly seventeen, with a good-tempered mouth and a certain laziness of eye. His adolescence was marked by the regrettable purple socks that matched the silk handkerchief which drooped languidly out of his breast pocket. Altogether a very fair specimen of the average English schoolboy, clean cut and straight run, nothing very brilliant in the intellectual line, but with soaring hopes of getting his cricket colours next season.

Roly can be dismissed as a small, intensely grubby boy, with a very wide mouth, a scratch across his

turned-up freckled nose, and a large grin that showed two teeth missing in front. He was, however, the possessor of a most charming and gravely courteous manner, which, when he cared to use it, could extract many a tip from his mother's friends. Heated with the flush of battle, he bawled out as his sisters approached:

"I say, Livvy! I'm goin' down to the mill-pond to see if that old raft is still there? Comin'?"

"No, thanks. I'm going with D-Deirdre. Go and fall in b-by yourself."

"You're a coward! You won't come 'cause you're frightened, Sissy!"

"I'm *not,* you horrid, rude little beast!"

"Yah!" said Roly, putting out his tongue, and squinting horribly.

Olivia pushed back the Mushroom and advanced, her face scarlet. But Deirdre caught hold of her.

"Oh, shut up!" she said. "You don't want to get me into another row, do you? Roly, don't be a rude little boy. Livvy, you can go with him if you like—I can walk to Gilly's by myself."

"I'll come with you," said Howard, who at the word "row" had pricked up his ears.

Olivia, who really wanted to go with Roly, hesitated, torn between her dignity and desire. Desire won, and dragging up one stocking, she followed the now admirable Roly through the garden out into the road. Deirdre and Howard followed more slowly, and it was only when they were out in the shady road that the boy spoke.

"I say, what's all this about a row?"

"A row with *Her,* of course," said Deirdre curtly.

"What *ho!* What was it about?"

"You—and Olivia. You making a row in the garden, and Livvy torturing the grand with the 'Jolly Peasant.'"

Howard stopped short, his pleasant boyish face flushing.

"Oh, I say! What rotten luck! But what's it got to do with you how much row I make?"

"I being the eldest, am supposed to keep order among you all. *She* thinks I'm a sort of nursery governess and automaton rolled into one. Well, I'm not. I told Her so."

"Oh, I say!" said Howard again, and with distress. He was very fond of Deirdre, but did not quite understand her at times.

"For once I told Her what I thought of Her. I think," said Deirdre without the slightest amusement or triumph, "that I got in one or two things rather neatly. She was almost stunned into silence—think of that!"

"I do!" grinned Howard appreciatively. He had no occasion to love his mother. "My aunt! I wish I'd heard you, old girl."

"Howard, do you think She'll be any nicer now? *Do* you? Do you think She'll give me pretty clothes, and friends, and let me come down to dinner at nights? Oh, it isn't fair that we all should be neglected like this!" She was climbing a stile as she spoke, and she turned, with a foot on the first rung, tears actually

in her green eyes. "Look at me!" she said despairingly. "Don't I look awful? Simply abominably shabby and vile?"

Howard surveyed her with troubled eyes. Even his boyish eyes saw that somehow she was "wrong"—other chaps' sisters at Lords', or on Founders' Day, didn't look like this, all out of elbows and down at heel and shabby.

"It's a shame!" he said hotly. "That old devil! Oh Lord, if only Dad had a bit more guts he'd pitch into Her, and make Her turn you out decently."

"Yes, he would," said Deirdre tonelessly. "But what's the use? He won't."

There was something so despairing in her voice and walk that Howard, with a rare outburst of demonstrativeness, took her arm.

"I say, buck up, old girl," he urged. "Just wait for a bit and she's sure to knuckle down. Why don't you get Aunt Vi to do something?"

"She's away now—abroad. But I know she'd help me, the darling. She's always pitching into Her about the way Livvy and Roly are allowed to run wild. Isn't it jolly queer that two sisters like Aunt Vi and Her should be so different?"

"Um! P'raps *She's* a what-jer-call-it—a throw back, you know. Wish Aunt Vi had married Dad."

"So do I—though for her sake I'm glad she didn't. Dad's an old dear, but he's got about as much pep as a veal sandwich. But don't you worry! I'm going to get out of this sort of life if I have to elope with someone! You watch me, my lad!"

With one of her sudden and bewildering changes of mood she was laughing now, and Howard, much relieved, dropped her arm.

"I say, do you mind if I hop it now? I want to buzz up to the links and have a round before lunch. What are you going to do?"

"Oh, just stroll round. Cheeroh—I may come up afterwards."

She watched him out of sight, and then wandered down a little path into Gilly's Wood, a favourite haunt of hers when she wanted to be alone, bereft of even the beloved Howard's company.

For there were strange places in Deirdre's soul—hidden gardens and pleasances that the boy, who loved her perhaps better than any of the others, was dimly aware of, and never sought to explore. She would get queer moods, that Olivia once declared "gave her the pip"—moods when she walked and talked miles away from everyone else, with dreaming eyes that looked at the everyday world and saw it not. On such occasions she would retire to Gilly's Wood and sit, arms clasping knees, dreaming, brooding, planning—escape. Escape into the world that she wanted so desperately, escape from ugly clothes, and obscurity, and loneliness——

Escape. . . .

III

Few penetrated into Gilly's Wood, for a large noticeboard on the outskirts of it announced that "Trespassers would be prosecuted." Therefore Deir-

dre, who for years had been granted the free run of it by Farmer Gilly, a great friend of hers, found all the solitude there that she could desire.

Gilly's Wood was large, and a little stream ran through it, spanned at intervals by picturesque little bridges made of logs. Deirdre loved it at all times—when the first primroses and wind-flowers made a delicate carpet for one's feet; in bluebell time; in the Autumn, when she walked ankle-deep in the orange and russet sea of dead leaves, the silence broken only by the soft whispering of falling leaves or the little "plop!" of a beech nut falling; and even in the Winter, when the ground by the stream was thick in mud, and the trees stood stripped and black against a dreary sky. But bluebell time was her favourite, and it was bluebell time now.

She went to her favourite place—a natural little clearing by the stream—one shimmer of mauve blue. A giant beech tree hung over the stream—she sat down in her usual place, a sort of chair formed by its great twisted mossy roots.

The girl lay back and closed her eyes. Her thoughts started gathering as usual, like bees round a honeypot, round the dream of her life——

Escape, escape!——

Funnily enough, no thoughts of love, or of a Fairy Prince who might help her to escape, ever entered her head. She would do it herself, independently, flaunting it in the face of the Lady in the Gilt Bed.

She would get out, and drag Olivia out with her. Howard and Roly were all right—they were boys—

Roly would soon be going to a preparatory school, and afterwards following Howard to Harrow. But it was for herself and Olivia that she felt sorry. If they had been sent to boarding school it would have perhaps been better. But that did not fit in with Mrs. Bellamy's scheme of things. Deirdre and Olivia could pick up anything they could with an inefficient governess at home, and then Deirdre could look after Roly for her. It dispensed with a nurse, and Mrs. Bellamy, despite her extravagance about herself, was canny. Her husband's firm had lately suffered a very severe loss, and she realized that the more expenses were cut down the better. So the children ran wild, a set of untidy, uncared-for little hooligans, while Deirdre planned escape——

She opened her eyes suddenly—how hot it was! The sun penetrated even through the thickly interlaced leaves above her. The bluebells were all round her, right down to the edge of the stream, where the ferns grew, washing up to the tree trunks in great waves of shimmery blue. The scent of them came to her in a sudden sweet breath—and the lazy drone of the bees blundering clumsily in and out of the delicate bells.

How hot it was! Deirdre sat up and looked at the stream—it murmured along so coldly—she could see the shining brown smoothness of the stones at the bottom——

It took her only a minute or so to drag off those clumsy heavy shoes and thick stockings, and to dabble her pink toes in the clear water. How cool it was,

and refreshing! She sent a shower of dew-drops flying with one foot, and laughed with the easily pleased amusement of a child. She picked a few bluebells and stuck them in her hair, bending to look at her laughing young face in the stream.

As she raised her eyes she saw the Boy—— He was leaning against a tree on the opposite bank—he must have been watching her for some minutes. They stared at each other for a few seconds, the girl with her red lips parted, the boy smiling. Then he said "Hulloa!" like a child at a party, and she, smiling back, "Hulloa!"

"I'm coming over! May I?"

She nodded, dumbly, watching him with eyes that were rather pathetically wistful.

He cleared the stream in one long leap, and stood looking down at her, laughing very gloriously. And she laughed too, a strange happy feeling possessing her.

He sat down and they stared at each other again, quite without embarrassment or curiosity. Indeed, each felt an odd sense of familiarity, as if long, long ago they had sat in this very wood and looked at each other thus. It was like, instead of a first encounter, a meeting after having been parted for years —Deirdre stared at the boy, and he stared back at her.

He was a tall lad, slenderly built, but with the figure of an athlete—he was perhaps nineteen years old. For the rest, Deirdre got an impression of a dark-skinned, thin, eager face, very bright, laughing

brown eyes, and untidy hair as black as her own. The mouth was well cut, with sensitive lips that laughed at her with a certain rather charming audacity.

She laughed back because she felt impelled to do so—there was something in this boy that called to her as insistently as a voice.

He spoke first, and he spoke gaily, as if they had been friends for years.

"I say, what ripping feet you have."

Deirdre looked at them with new eyes—no one had ever told her this before. They *were* beautiful, small and narrow, with a high, delicate instep, all white and rosy, like apple-blossom.

"You don't mind me saying that, do you?" asked the boy, leaning forward anxiously.

Deirdre smiled at him.

"I like it!" she told him childishly.

He looked relieved.

"Then that's all right! I thought you looked a ripper when I saw you. What's your name? I say, I feel that we're going to be awful pals."

Again that tingle of happiness all through her—This boy, with his audacious, smiling mouth, his gay eyes, his splendid youth——

"Deirdre," she said like a child.

"Deirdre what?"

A strange impish impulse made her shake her head.

"Just Deirdre——"

"Oh, very well! If you won't tell me I won't tell you! Deirdre—what a jolly queer name! Deirdre

—I rather like it though. Haven't you got a nickname?"

It did not seem a bit strange to be asked this by a strange boy of perhaps five minutes' acquaintance. She shook her head, laughing.

"Well, I shall call you 'Dear.' It's so much shorter than Deirdre—I say, do you mind?" He shot her the funniest look of anxiety and entreaty and gay audacity. She didn't mind in the least, and told him so. Indeed she exulted in it. He propped up his chin on his hands, still keeping his eyes fixed on her. "Then *that's* all right," he remarked comfortably. "I say, it's awfully queer but I feel as if I'd known you for ages and ages——"

"Do you really? So do I! Isn't it strange?"

They looked at each other appraisingly, and with something that was almost a little awed in their eyes. Then Deirdre said:

"What's your name? I've told you mine?"

"What? Oh, my name's Guy—I shan't tell you the other part as you won't tell me! Now as we're going to be pals we may as well exchange histories, etc., mayn't we? I'm nineteen, and I and my mother are staying near here at—no, I don't think I'll tell you the name as you're so keen on mysteries!" His dark eyes challenged hers gaily. "I wish you could meet my mother. She's just the toppingest thing in mothers going—though I expect," he added generously, "that yours is pretty near her." Deirdre smiled a little at this. "I am at Winchester, you know—I shall be leaving next term, though, worse luck. And then

comes the 'Varsity, and—well, I think that's about all there is to tell you. Now you——" He leaned back comfortably and prepared to listen.

Deirdre hesitated for a moment, then she said slowly:

"If I tell you the truth you won't be shocked, will you?"

"*Shocked!* Good Lord, no! Of course, don't tell me if you don't want to——"

"Oh, but I *do!* It's only that it may seem rather—rather awful to you. You see, you've got a topping mother and I haven't. It makes no end of difference. My mother gave us all picturesque names when we were born, and then wiped her hands of us. It's horrible to say—it may sound terrible to you—but we all loathe our mother."

"Oh, I say!" ejaculated Guy in distress.

"There, I *knew* that you'd be shocked! But so would you, if you were badly dressed, and kept in the background, and made to look after a small brother and sister all the time——"

"But look here," Guy said awkwardly, "are your people—er—badly off?"

"Badly off! No, there'd be some excuse if they were! But we live in a large house, and my mother is always giving parties and things, and she dresses gloriously. Yet Olivia and I go about in old clothes looking like ragamuffins—and she never speaks to me, or kisses me, or has me down in the drawing-room! Never, never! She hates me! I don't know why, but she hates me!"

The boy felt an extraordinary flood of anger, hearing these forlorn words, and seeing her tightly folded lips quiver a little in spite of themselves. The colour rushed up under his dark skin, and he impetuously caught hold of her hand. Just held it for a second tight, and then dropped it, but it seemed to her like a mute expression of sympathy.

"I wonder why she hates me? It seems so dreadful, doesn't it?"

"Is she pretty?"

"Oh, yes—dark, you know, with a sort of golden skin and dark eyes. And she wears such topping clothes that she looks about twenty-five."

"That of course explains it. Just take a peep at yourself in that jolly little stream affair, and you'll see why she doesn't like you."

Deirdre peeped obediently. She saw reflected in the water her own vivid, young dryad's face, with its beautiful mouth, its strange green eyes, its heavy waves of lustreless black hair.

And the boy watched her, smiling.

"Well, do you see?"

"I suppose you mean because I'm pretty? Do you think I am?"

"I shan't tell you what I think—it would take too long, and it might make you vain——"

This wonderful boy with his laughing mouth!

"I'm not vain. No one has ever told me I was pretty before. They used to call me 'Cat's-eyes' at home because my eyes are that horrible green——"

"Horrible! Don't be silly! They're exactly like

very deep, clear lakes, with a lot of jewels and things sunk at the bottom that one can't quite see but one knows are there——"

This wonderful boy!

And the amazing part is that he said this quite sincerely and simply, without any self-consciousness or confusion, and just as simply Deirdre listened.

She surveyed him curiously. He was certainly the most bewildering, strange, wonderful boy that she had ever met.

"Do you like poetry?"

"Like it? It's my hobby! I find some bit that has a sort of haunting sound, and I think of it, and store it up for days. That's what I shall do when I've finished at the 'Varsity—write, you know. Not poetry, because it's such a fag looking for a rhyme. But books and things."

"Honestly?" There was awe in her wide gaze. Certainly this was a marvellous youth.

"Oh, rather—I've always intended to."

He went on, laughingly—"I say, how rummy it is that we should be gassing away like this in no time, isn't it? Must be what-d'you-call-it—Destiny you know, that sent me here."

"You're trespassing, anyway," said Deirdre severely.

"Am I? Well, it was worth it, after all——"

They looked at each other again with grave eyes that suddenly were alight with mirth. They laughed together—for no particular reason other than the perfectly adequate one that they were both very young, and the bees in the bluebells were droning in a low,

pleasant burr, and a blackbird was calling somewhere in the woods.

Suddenly the boy lifted his head.

"Listen to that fellow," he said. "He's calling your name! 'Dear! Dear! Dear!'" He smiled at her, and she listened too.

"Dear! Dear! Dear!" fluted the blackbird.

"This wood must be yours," said Guy gaily. "Even the birds know it! I say, you're not a thingummy—a dryad affair, are you? You look rather like one, you know! Promise you won't disappear into the stream, or turn into an oak tree, or any rot like that, won't you?"

"No, I won't turn into an oak tree, but I've got to go now. It must be nearly lunch time. Where are my stockings? Oh, you're sitting on them!"

He tossed them over, and watched her, frowning, as, quite free from self-consciousness, she drew them on, hiding the pink and white slenderness of her pretty feet.

"It seems a shame to hide them," he said abruptly.

"And these stockings are so thick too——"

"You ought to have those shiny silk ones, like mother's, and silver shoes——"

Deirdre smiled.

"Always silver shoes?"

"Always and always—like a Fairy Princess, you know. They'd twinkle as you walked——"

The girl got up, and he gathered up his long person from the soft mossy ground.

"Good-bye——"

"Oh, I say—aren't you coming again? Do come to-morrow!"

They stood looking at each other—the boy half smiling, half grave, the girl serious.

"Do you want me to come?"

"Rather! Why"—his voice was injured—"I thought we were going to be pals!" His warm gaze swept her, surrounded her.

"All right—yes, I'll come."

"You will? Oh, well played! Well then, it's not good-bye, is it? Only *au revoir*——"

"*Au revoir,* then——"

"*Au revoir*—Dear——"

His eyes were audaciously mocking, challenging her—she had to laugh—this boy called for laughter. And, laughing, she went—as quickly as the fleeing dryad he had compared her to. The woods lay still and waited for the morrow.

IV

That evening Deirdre Bellamy, leaving the others squabbling in the nursery over "Beggar-my-Neighbour," slipped downstairs and very softly opened the door of the library.

As she had expected, her father was sitting in one of the big leather arm-chairs reading. The soft light from the little Chinese shaded reading-lamp threw a pleasant warmth over his weak, kindly face, and on the array of magazines and journals neatly piled on the table.

Deirdre liked the library, especially now, when the

wine-red velvet curtains were drawn, and the lamplight picked out the gold toolings of the books that lined the room. Mr. Bellamy was proud of his library, which contained several very rare editions. And he fostered his eldest daughter's love of books, allowing her the free run of the book shelves. This was one of the few joys of Deirdre's life. To her the library was a field of flowers, out of which she could pick and cherish the choicest blooms. Here was a wide and strangely assorted field. She read Dickens and Ruskin, Thackeray, Ouida, Carlyle, Shakespeare, Oscar Wilde. But poetry was to her, as to the strange boy of Gilly's Wood, the first and best thing. Beauty she adored in any form. It was a cult to her—she who had to do with so little beauty. More than a cult—a passion, a craving, an intense desire.

Beauty of line—the clean, strong lines of an athletic boy, the curve of a throat and chin—beauty of colour—a sunset, perhaps, or apple-blossom against a lapis-lazuli sky, or the red of a girl's young mouth—beauty of sound—above all beauty of sound—Music that made one's heart come into one's throat with sheer rapture. And the subtler music of a haunting phrase, a turn and twist of words that spoke and sobbed like the wailing cadences of violins, or a bar of Chopin played on muted strings, or the wind in the willows through the grey and lilac of a June dusk. . . .

Beauty called to her, holding out glorious arms. Beauty sang to her from the printed page. She read Shelley and Rupert Brooke, John Masefield and Keats, Rossetti, Browning, the sad, slow music of Yeats.

They opened for her "magic casements" which showed her enchanted "perilous seas in faerie lands forlorn" of which she had never before even dreamt

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Mr. Bellamy peered at her mildly and kindly as she came in. He was rather handsome in a rugged sort of way, with short-sighted grey eyes, and a weak mouth. He was fond of his children in his own way—especially of Howard and Deirdre. That they were shamefully neglected he had not got enough sense to see. If he had done it would not have mattered very much. He had protested once or twice, very half-heartedly, to his wife, and then, feeling his duty done, bothered no more about it. And Deirdre, standing looking down at him, felt a sudden rush of despair, as she realized that here was no ally to help her with her one consuming idea. She might have known—she might have guessed—knowing him so well.

She kissed him.

"Hulloa, Daddy——"

"Hulloa, dear! How goes it to-day?"

He put down his book and stretched out an arm. Hope lifted up a dying head in her—he was so kind—so very kind.

"Well, to tell you the truth—rottenly!"

"Dear, dear!" Apprehension tinged his voice.

"You—you haven't been getting into trouble with your mother again, have you?"

"Well, I—yes, we did have rather a row!"

"A row!" Mr. Bellamy, most peace-loving of mortals, shrank from the very word.

Deirdre suddenly found herself hesitating.

It was about—we—I—oh, Daddy, she keeps us so badly! We never go anywhere, or have pretty clothes, or anything—anything!"

Mr. Bellamy felt peevishly that this was going to spoil his evening.

"But surely—" he said weakly.

"Oh, look at me! This vile old dress! These heavy shoes! and *Her,* in Her gilt bed! *Her!*" Deirdre sprang up—she stood facing him. "Olivia's as bad—but at present she's not at the age to care much. But I do! I'm starved for everything that most girls have always had—people to love me, and dances and things, and pretty clothes, and—and"—absurdly she thought of something that Guy had said, and her eyes filled—"silk stockings!"

"Silk stockings!" said Mr. Bellamy, by now almost stupefied.

"Yes—like *She* wears! Silk, not thick wool or lisle thread! I've never had a pair in my life, and I'm *going* to! Daddy, can't you understand?"

"But my dear child," began Mr. Bellamy helplessly, "surely your mother knows best. Remember you are only a little girl still, and that your time for dances and—er—silk stockings will come later."

He felt horribly priggish and pompous as he said this. And horribly staggered when Deirdre said for the second time that day, in a flat dreary voice—"I'm over seventeen." She knew that it was no good, that she could expect no help from this quarter. But she said slowly:

"You see, Daddy, it's the time when most girls come out. Ask Her if I may go up to London and stay with Aunt Vi. Do ask her, Daddy darling. It's the only way. I must get out of this—I must!"

Her father felt disturbed and upset. He watched her go and leave him to enjoy the very interesting memoirs that he was reading.

Anything for her to go——

It was so easy to promise——

"Very well. Yes, I'll say something about it. But I'm very much afraid—still, I'll ask. Now, run along, little girl, and for heaven's sake go softly past your mother's door. She has a headache. Good night, dear ——"

Anything for her to go——

The memoirs again, and peace, and the lamplight glinting on the gold-tooled leather of the books.

Deirdre went, knowing in her heart that she had failed. A selfish mother, a broken reed of a father—now her only chance lay with Aunt Vi. Jolly Aunt Vi, with her monocle, and her sables, and her deep, hearty laugh.

She was at Nice now, but she was coming home—she had written to say so—very soon. And then—who knew? Perhaps it would be escape after all—escape from nursery teas and flannel petticoats and "Beggar-my-Neighbour."

She opened the door of the old nursery—since designated by the more dignified title of "School-room," and walked in. The three at the table were so busily engaged in heated argument that they did not

even notice her entrance. She walked over to the window and stood looking out. The night was still and clear. The pale mauve sky was powdered with stars. She stood thinking of a great many things—of her mother's drawn, distorted, beautiful face—of bluebells and bees and a blue, blue sky—of a boy's dark-skinned, thin, eager face and always half-audacious brown eyes —of "Dear, Dear, Dear!" And all these seemed welded into one vibrant, thrilling word—Escape——

There was an argument going on at the table. Voices raised—Olivia stammering—Howard crying, "Cheat!"

"I'm n-n-not!"

"You bally little cheat!"

"You're a l-liar! D-damn you!"

Confusion——. A chair overturned—chaos—the door opened with a crash—skurrying feet down the passage.

Deirdre turned in dismay. She heard sounds of the chase—Howard leaping, cursing after the flying Olivia —A yell of "Got you!" A sudden crash that seemed to shake the house. Of course that was Olivia skidding on the mat outside her mother's room— Sounds of conflict, and Roly giving tongue. Then came an opening door—a shrill, wrathful voice:

"What is the meaning of this! Howard! Olivia!"

Deirdre, peering over the banisters, as she ran downstairs, saw her mother standing like an avenging goddess in the doorway; with Roly, standing on the knob of the banisters, shouting "Yoicks!" and "Tally-ho!" in great glee—Howard and Olivia were rolling over

and over on the floor—both fighting like wild beasts. Olivia was biting and kicking—Howard, forgetting his age and dignity, yelling, "You called me a liar!"—more chaos and great conflict.

Mr. Bellamy, torn from his memoirs, came dashing upstairs. Deirdre came dashing down. Her mother saw her, paused, quivering. They stood looking at each other. Then Mrs. Bellamy, her face twitching, swept into her room and slammed the door. Mr. Bellamy followed her.

The combatants on the floor separated—Olivia with a bleeding nose, Howard nursing his wrist where the imprint of Olivia's small, sharp teeth showed angrily.

"For goodness' sake get up and come upstairs," said Deirdre. "Howard, you are an ass to make such a fuss—Livvy, get up and go and wash your nose. You and Roly must go to bed——"

"I say, is it bleeding much?" asked Howard anxiously. "Livvy, old girl, I'm most awfully sorry if I—er——"

"Oh, not m-much," said Olivia airily. She picked up the hem of her crumpled cotton dress and scientifically staunched the flow with it. "Besides, I b-bit you. Did it hurt?"

"I should jolly well think it did, you little devil. My aunt, you *have* got sharp teeth."

"I know," said Olivia complacently. "Still, I'm sorry. You needn't have g-got into such a bait, though —n-need he, Deirdre? I s-say, Deirdre, need I go to bed yet? Just *one* g-game more?"

Deirdre was walking ahead with Roly. Olivia

came and caught hold of her arm, still holding the hem of her skirt to her damaged nose.

"Oh, all right," said Deirdre.

She did not feel in the mood for argument after the chaos of the day. They got the Happy Family cards out.

The Happy Family sat down amicably to play.

CHAPTER II

EMPTY

I

THE next morning Guy was there again waiting for her among the bluebells. He saw her coming a long way off, stepping with the lithe boyish walk that was habitual to her. There was just a hint of insolence, a touch of swaggering grace about her walk that gave it a peculiar charm. It was not so much a girl's walk as a boy's—easy, long steps like a schoolboy's.

She wore to-day a green dress—her best, to be truthful, which she had put on urged by a touch of vanity. Her long, lustreless black hair hung over her shoulders in two heavy plaits, which gave her young face a certain medieval air. She reminded the boy of a picture he had seen somewhere of Queen Guinevere, dressed in a pale green gown, with great hanging sleeves edged with fur, rosy-lined, silver-laced. The fleeting fancy brushed him that he would like to see Deirdre dressed like that, in the shimmer of satin and silver, with pearls round her throat, and pearls twisted in the braids of her long black hair——

She walked knee-deep in bluebells and smiled at him. He called out to her:

"Hulloa, Dear!"

"Hulloa, Guy!"

They stood looking at each other, laughing-mouthed. It was good to be young and together. Deirdre felt almost frightened when she realized exactly how good it was. Life was somehow subtly changed. To think that the day before yesterday it had held for her no dark, audacious, laughing eyes, no gay voice that said "Dear," and made it sound like a bar of music, or a line of a sonnet, or something beautiful. Yet it had done. In some mysterious, subtle way she had known they were there—had been there through eternity—waiting for her. Again the odd feeling of familiarity possessed her. It swept her for a second —a sort of brief picture, like a shadow on a cinematograph screen, of her and this boy—somewhere—together—long long, very long ago. Swept her and was gone. It was like a curtain dropping over a window

———

Then they sat down together, still looking at each other—not curiously, but intently, gravely, as if they were trying to imprint each other's faces on their memories.

They began to talk. Guy sat with his back against the tree—arms round his hunched-up, long young legs. He listened, smiling, but his intent gaze never left her. She felt his dark eyes looking at her, and whenever she turned she met their half-serious, half-mocking gaze. She liked to feel it—it was like something warm and friendly enveloping her.

He was a beautiful listener. A word here and there,

and he had the story of last night's endeavours, its fight, its Happy Family. He listened, laughing. Deirdre liked his laugh—it curled up one corner of his rather too sensitive mouth into the nicest, faunish curl in the world.

"I say, what a funny kid your sister must be!"

"Olivia?"

"Yes, Olivia. That's another name I rather like. It's got a nice mignonette smell about it."

"Smell? How can names have smells?"

"I don't know—they have for me, anyway. Does it seem an awfully mad wheeze to you?"

"No, I like it. What does my name smell of?" She leaned forward, lips parted, as eager and intrigued as a child listening to a fairy story.

"Yours?—Deirdre"—his huskily soft voice caressed it—"Deirdre—a sort of violet-y, peat-smoky smell. Or the wind on the moors, smelling of the hot gorse and bracken and heather—you know, that warm, nutty smell. Anyway, it's something out of doors, and sweet and clean. Nothing hot-housy like roses or lilies."

She was as pleased as a child. Her eyes were shining like clear water.

"How do you think of all that?"

"I don't know," he said again. "Of course at school I have a reputation for being slightly barmy. If I wasn't fairly good at games and things they'd think I was quite off my head."

Deirdre gave a little lazy gurgle of laughter.

"'A prophet is without honour in his own country!' Wait until you start! Think how proud I shall feel

when I see a new novel by Guy——" She stopped abruptly, and he smiled.

"Ha ha! Guy who? That's the question. Still I shan't tell you until you tell me!"

Deirdre tilted her dark head on one side, like a bird. It struck him that she was really very like a bird—something warm and soft and tiny in one's hand.

"Well, I shan't!"

"Oh, I say! Why on earth not?"

"It would take all the fun and mystery away! It's so much nicer not knowing—just guessing! Besides, think if you found out that I was Deirdre Smith! And for all I know you may be Guy Jones! Think of the disillusionment!"

"'A rose by any other name,' etc.! And I can promise you my name isn't Jones! And I'm ready to bet a dollar that your isn't Smith!"

"It might be! Or something worse, you know, like Buggins——"

Her face quivered into laughter.

"Deirdre Buggins!"

"Deirdre Fiddlesticks! Look here, I tell you it's impossible to have a name like Buggins when you've got green eyes and a dimple in your elbow."

"Why on earth not?"

"Oh, it's not done! Not on Tuesdays, anyway."

They looked at each other and suddenly burst out laughing.

Deirdre felt happy. She felt a-tingle with happiness. It sort of glowed through her like a fire. It was being with this boy, with his nonsense, his dark,

audacious eyes—it was the laughter and the youth and the absurd, dear gaiety of it. It was—for a brief and glorious period—escape.

Then they sobered swiftly. He asked her, with a seriousness which made her suspect more latent laughter——

"Do you remember the first time I met you?"

She puckered her brows.

"It doesn't need much effort on my part! Why, it was only yesterday."

"Oh, I don't mean that time. I mean the first time of all—centuries and centuries ago——"

The look of distress in her eyes was almost funny. She was so afraid of seeming stupid to this wonderful, this bewildering boy.

"Guy—I—I'm afraid——"

He hastened to reassure her.

"Have you ever heard of pre-existence?"

The word was familiar to her. She suddenly remembered a book she had read somewhere—pre-existence—of course——

"It means that you've lived before, doesn't it?"

"That's it. It's only a theory, of course, and I never thought twice about it till I met you yesterday. Then that confounded feeling of familiarity got me. I knew that I'd never set eyes on you before in my life, but yet I *knew* you! Somehow I'd known you were somewhere waiting for me all my life—I knew how your voice would sound—I knew how your mouth would look when it smiled—I—I'd always known ——"

Deirdre and the boy looked at each other. Their faces were grave and a little awed. When the girl spoke her voice was a little unsteady.

"I knew too! I had that same feeling! How queer —how awfully queer——"

"So thinking about it in bed last night I hit on that notion—pre-existence."

"You mean that you and I—you and I——?"

"Were together—somewhere—sometime—but we were together. Surely you remember?"

"Tell me—tell me!"

"I wish I knew. Perhaps it was at Solomon's Court —— Good old Solomon——"

"The Song of Solomon." Suddenly she remembered it. She said softly:

" 'King Solomon made himself a chariot of the wood of Lebanon.

" 'He made the pillars thereof of silver, the bottom thereof of gold, the midst thereof being paved with love, for the daughters of Jerusalem.' "

"You were one of the 'daughters of Jerusalem,' then. You were a dancing girl—no, I think you were a Princess. You wore pearls in your hair, and golden sandals, and you sat in a golden chair. And two black slaves fanned you with peacock fans, and you had a panther cub at your feet."

This was better than all the stories in the world. She believed every word he said—the picture he painted sprang vividly to life before her eyes.

"And you—what were you?"

"I was the Captain of the Guard—your Guard.

You never looked at me, of course—you kept your lashes hiding your green eyes. You sat playing with your panther cub, and I watched you from a long way off."

"What happened? What did we do?"

"Ah—I wonder! I can only guess——"

"Tell me some more," she said, with a child's insatiable greed for romance.

The boy ran long brown fingers through his black hair, making it stand on end in a wildly comical way.

"Well, let me see—— You were one of Marie Antoinette's ladies-in-waiting. You know, you'd look ripping with powdered curls, and a patch at the corner of your mouth, and a flowered crinoline. I was a peasant—yes, I was, so you needn't frown!" He dropped the rôle of romancer to fulfil that of orchestra, and whistled a few bars of the "Marseillaise." "I watched you sometimes driving along in your gilded coach, but of course you never looked at me. I was only the rabble under your little feet in their scarlet-heeled shoes. You were a very haughty lady——"

"Oh, but I *wasn't!*" protested Deirdre. "I'm not a bit haughty!"

"Yes, you were!" persisted the orator. "Very haughty! You sat in the coach playing with your beastly little spaniel, and you never even *looked!*"

"Yes, I did!" said Deirdre naïvely. "Just a little peep at you—I just couldn't help it!"

Guy relented.

"Well, just a peep, then. But that didn't count. I hated you for sitting in a gilded coach with diamonds

on your fingers and a jewelled collar round the neck of your spaniel—I *hated* you!"

"Oh, did you?" said Deirdre in a small, forlorn voice.

Guy hastened to reassure her.

"But I loved you too, all the same—I just couldn't help loving you——"

"Oh, *did* you?" said Deirdre happily. She looked at him with shining eyes—this wonderful boy! This marvellous boy!

"The Revolution came, and of course you were swept into it. The people hated you for your haughty ——"

"Oh, *no!*"

"Oh, *yes!*—your haughty selfishness. By this time I was something of a nib in the Republic, and I sat in the tribunal that condemned you to death. I watched you going in the tumbril—I watched you on the steps of the guillotine. You saw me, too, and you sneered as you passed by——"

Deirdre was far away from the Sussex wood, standing on the steps of the guillotine looking at the tall young citizen in his caped coat and red-cockaded tricorne, whose dark eyes burnt fiercely in a pale, set face. Looking at him with a sneer on her lips for a moment, then passing on, fine lady to the very end, aloof, haughty, cynically amused, to the Greatest Adventure of All. . . .

"And I *loved* you," said the boy.

He was quite pleased with the little tragedy he had evolved—pleased when he saw the effect it had on her

—the clear eyes darkening with horror, the sensitive mouth actually strained with tragedy.

"But that's terrible—that's sad! We weren't sad, were we? Oh, Guy, we weren't unhappy? We *can't* be!"

Swiftly, he hastened to reassure—the half-tender, half-whimsical curl of his lips!

"Of course not, Baby! I was only making it up. How on earth can I tell? I only know—feel it, deep down in me—that we were always together. We can't fight against it—it's—Kismet."

Like a child, her cloud had passed. How could one be unhappy with this boy? And the little stream was singing—singing as it danced and hurried and skipped over the smooth, shining brown stones. A yellow butterfly hovered over it for a minute, perilously close, looking like a flower petal against the silvery water, until it was blown aimlessly along. Ferns bent down to the water, and tottering grass, and ladies' lace, and the sky was an intensely vivid blue between the lattice of fresh young beech boughs, and from the far-off sheep pens came the pleasant, drowsily remote tinkle of bells.

She turned on him a face so radiant that he was almost startled. It gave him the impression of a flower—the clear, warmly white skin, soft and smooth as the texture of a petal, the green depths of wide eyes, the vivid scarlet of those disdainfully curved lips. And, as a foil to all this flower-like colour, the thick waves of dead black hair, with its enchanting purplish shadows. She looked at him gravely and

frankly, like a child, and like a child she said in her clear, young voice:

"I'm so glad——" Very softly and simply and sweetly—"I'm so glad——"

The colour mounted under his dark skin in a swift rush. Suddenly he wanted to shout, to run very fast with the rain stinging his face, or the sun in his eyes, or the wind buffeting him—pressing its strong, clean exhilarating kiss on his lips. He got up—he could not remain sitting. He threw back his handsome head and laughed. Triumph was in that laugh, a little audacity, possession, and something that was none of these, but a sort of shaken joy that he hid beneath the jewelled mask of Laughter.

Deirdre watched the boy as he stood there. He looked extraordinarily handsome—tall and slender and strong-limbed as one of the old Grecian gods. No, most of all he reminded her of the Winged Mercury —eager, poised, ardent—— This boy's every movement was full of grace and strength. The whole impression of him seemed to be swift and clean and full of most eagerly leaping life——

Life—that was it. Beautiful, keen, strong Life—— She wanted it—she held out her arms to it, as a flower turns its face to the sun. Life——

Escape—escape——!

II

That night her father came in late. She waylaid him in the hall as he came in. As he opened the door a breath of fragrant air crept past him. She got a

glimpse of swaying trees silhouetted against a heavy, languorous, purple sky, and a sultry apricot yellow moon that hung low in the sky like a beautiful Japanese lantern.

Inside it was all quiet—very quiet. Her mother had gone away that morning for a week to some friends in London, and the peace during her absence was like a sudden calm after a tempestuous storm.

Deirdre caught hold of her father's arm eagerly. Hope was in her shining eyes, tilting the corners of her mouth. Looking at her beautiful little face—the great, clear, translucent eyes, the curve of chin and throat—he felt a twinge of compunction.

"Well—did you speak to Her about it, Daddy dear? What did She say? Tell me—do tell me? Did She say I may go to Auntie Vi?"

His smile was uneasy.

"Well, to tell you the truth—she was upset last night—you young devils, you know—all the worry—couldn't very well tell her then—— And this morning I only saw her for a moment before she went——"

"You—didn't—tell Her?"

"Well, how could I, old lady? Wrong time to choose, you know—in a rage—undiplomatic—very. But when she comes home—we'll see what we can do. Eh?" Again that uneasy smile—fumbling in pockets—something soft and tissue-wrapped in her hand. "Just a little present, dear—to make up for it—something you said you wanted. Now, run along—run along——"

She did not move—so he left her there, standing

under the big rose-shaded standard lamp. She stood there quite a long time, motionless. She took in the scene round her with astonishing minuteness. The lamp cast a soft rosy glow on the panelled walls, and the dull gilt frames of the portraits. One, hanging over the wide fireplace, was an ancestress of her own—and oddly like her. And it seemed to her that the girl, with her black love-locks, her narrow, long-fingered, white hands, smiled down at her pityingly from her gilt frame.

Then she turned round and went—upstairs to her little room. It was next door to the nursery—a queer, bare little place with its narrow bed, its white walls. But the view from the little window was wonderful—right over the hills to the bare shoulder of the Downs and the blue mistiness of the Weald. A wistaria climbed up the wall outside—in the Spring it hung great heavy purple tassels of blossom round her window, and in the Winter the dry tendrils and leaves tapped on the glass like timid fingers. She could hear the wind now, stirring and sighing among the thick leaves and drooping flowers.

The girl sat down on the edge of the narrow bed. She stared straight in front of her with dull eye—facing Defeat. She knew that, despite her father's vague promises, Defeat stared her in the face. Unless a miracle happened she was shut in—shut in from Life and all the dear things of Life—Laughter and Youth—Love—somewhere waiting for her, remote and fugitive and gloriously smiling. People and things—the throb and stir and pulse of the world—dark laughing eyes and a strong, leaping flame——

That was it—the Flame of Life. And she had missed it all. Defeat. . . .

Deirdre suddenly became aware of the crushed tissue-wrapped parcel in her hand. She looked at it aimlessly—with curiously stiff fingers undid the string. Something soft and silken and shimmering, like a snake, slid into her lap—a pair of silk stockings—black, with lace let in all the way up the instep. Silk stockings—— "To make up for it——"

Suddenly she laughed, rather a high, harsh laugh. She turned them over in her hands—they felt like gossamer fabric, spun out of cobwebs on fairy looms.

Deirdre looked at them, and then at her own coarse stockings and shabby shoes. At the little bare room, with its open window through which stole the subtle fragrance of the sleeping garden, and the rustling of the wistaria leaves. At her own face in the square of glass on the wall—her own face, that seemed somehow a stranger's. Suddenly a tear, like a single diamond, fell on to the stockings in her lap. It lay there, shimmering in the light—she put them away in a drawer and started undressing.

Lying in the little bed staring into the darkness, Deirdre thought of many things: chiefly of the world that she longed so intensely to see. Places on the atlas, mere names that conjured up wonderful scenes in her vivid imagination—the smooth melting sound of Venice—sunset over lagoons, tinging the pale marble of steps and palaces with faint rose, a gondola slipping over the amber-stained water like a black swan—sunset gradually fading and deepening into

dusk. Venice like a sleeping Princess beneath her twilight veil of dim blue and grey and mauve. Lanterns on the prows of the silent gondolas, casting a pale orange glow on the silvery water—marble gleaming wan in the moonlight—a man's voice, low and sweet, coming faintly over the water in some Southern love song—the plucked strings of a guitar——

New York—its bustle and stir, the roar of Broadway at night time, its electric signs, the rattle of the overhead railway.

Granada—the very name sounded soft and liquid, tinged with Romance—the Court of Lions, by moonlight.

Tunis, Tangiers, dusky faces and strange tongues—beyond that into the "Garden of Allah"—the desert. Dream cities built pyramid by pyramid from travel books she had read, poems, pictures. Hers was the wander lust—the craving to see the world and its cities—to escape from her own narrow limit.

"Escape!" she said fiercely to the darkness, "I *will* escape! Whatever it costs me! Whatever I have to pay! I'll get out of this—into Life!"

Venice—New York—Granada—Tunis——

The Flame of Life, glowing, leaping——

She fell asleep at last, with the tears still wet on her lashes.

III

The next morning, and for many mornings, Deirdre and Guy kept their innocent tryst in the little clearing of Gilly's Wood.

Deirdre felt that in that short week she had shown more of her hidden self than she had ever done before in her life. They talked of so many things, simply and frankly, and without the least touch of self-conscious priggishness which would have spoilt it all. They talked of poetry, and people, Swinburne, swimming, beauty and music. Of birds and golf, pre-existence, the Brontës. Deirdre told him of all her efforts and plans to get out into the world she wanted so intensely, of her dreams of all those names of wonder—Venice, Tunis and Granada—of her craving for beauty and colour. In turn the boy spoke of his dreams and ambitions, his mother, his life. As they talked they looked at each other with clear eyes, and they laughed a great deal, because of their youth, and their nearness, and Spring.

It was on a Monday that they had first met, and on the Monday week Guy had a message for her.

"Mother sent you her love——"

Deirdre's eyes widened.

"*Me?* Did she really, Guy?"

"Of course she did. I told her all about you the first day we met. She was awfully interested——"

"Was she? Are you sure she didn't mind us making friends, and all that?"

"*Mind?* You don't know my mother! She was no end pleased and interested. And I told her all about my pre-existence notion—it quite excited her. She wants to meet you most awfully. So she sent you her love, and she is going to try and come along here one morning before we go——"

A thrill of pleasure shot through her, mingled with dismay. The pleasure was for the love that Guy's mother had sent her. The dismay was for his last words—"Before we go——"

But how silly of her! He and his mother were only staying in the neighbourhood. They had to go one day. Still—"Before we go——" Dismay made her voice forlorn.

"When do you go?"

"Not for another week or so. Mother likes it down here awfully."

Another week—one little week——

"I shall miss you horribly when you're gone——"

She could not keep the little forlorn quiver out of her voice. He heard it, and his voice was suddenly amazingly gentle.

"So shall I, Dear—you don't know how I shall miss you——"

She looked away miserably, at the stream which had suddenly ceased to sparkle, at the bluebells that had all become one misty blue blur.

"Oh, but it's all right for you. You'll have people to love you—your mother—friends—I have no one. I shall be alone again—all alone."

"Not alone, Dear. You're not going to forget me, are you? You'll write to me sometimes? You must. We can't just meet and drift apart again. We'll write, and keep in touch?"

She looked at him with soft eyes.

"Oh, we must, we must! You'll tell me how you get on with your writing, won't you? And then we'll meet

again one day—perhaps you'll come down here again?"

"Of course we will. Cheer up, old thing, I'll write you long letters—honestly. But you must tell me your name, you know, and address."

Mischief peeped out of her dancing eyes, lurked in the curve of her red mouth.

"Not yet—not yet! Let's keep it up a little longer—our pretence!"

"Oh, but I say, you must tell me before we go——"

"Oh, of course. To-morrow! There, will that satisfy you? To-morrow, with solemn pomp and show, we'll disclose names and addresses, and become two ordinary people instead of romantic creatures in an enchanted wood. But we'll have one day more of make-pretend, shall we? Just one more!"

"Oh, all right!" He laughed down at her. "If you're so keen——"

"It's the intriguing mystery of it that appeals to me—just Guy and Deirdre—no silly surnames—nothing——"

"Still, we'll have to trot out those 'silly surnames' before I go. Think if I went not knowing who you were! Think if we never knew!"

Deirdre smiled dreamily.

"It would be something like 'Evangeline'—we'd go on never knowing, until we were old, old people, and then I'd find you when you were dying, and we'd tell each other our names before you died——"

"Oh, would we?" grumbled Guy. "It sounds to me a pretty cheerful programme. I don't think I feel as if I could figure with success in a tragedy—— No

—tell you what—I'd be like that old girl in history—what's-her-name—who came to London to find her lover, and went through the streets yelling out 'Gilbert!' Can't you see me going through Bamberly shrieking: 'Deirdre! Deirdre! Deirdre!' "

They burst out laughing at the thought. Then Guy said swiftly:

"Would you come if you heard me calling?"

She looked at him with her whole soul in her shining eyes.

"You know I would," she said simply.

They said good-bye standing under the giant beech-tree.

"You'll be here to-morrow—without fail?"

"Of course I will——"

"And you'll tell me your name and address?"

"Yes—good-bye——"

They looked into each other's eyes—a very long, unsmiling, intense look. Then she turned and went. At the bend of the little path she paused and waved her hand. He was standing with his back to the tree, watching her. The sunlight through the beech boughs threw lozenges of light on his dark hair, his slender height. The boy always remembered the picture of Deirdre as she stood there, with her smiling eyes, her long, swinging black plait. One second she stood looking at him— Then she was gone.

IV

The next morning Mrs. Bellamy came back. Deirdre met her just as she was going to Gilly's Wood.

She stepped out of the car, beautifully groomed and dressed, as usual—to-day in a pale fawn coat and skirt, and a cerise hat that suited her dark eyes and skin.

"Hulloa!" said Deirdre in a friendly voice.

She was friendly with all the world to-day—was she not going to Gilly's Wood and Guy?

Mrs. Bellamy looked at her curiously. Again the child's beauty struck her—she was absolutely blooming. She had changed—in some subtle, undefinable way—from the Deirdre of a week ago. Her eyes were vividly green, and shining like clear water. Her mouth, her hair—everything had somehow changed and gathered beauty. It was like an exquisite bud that overnight had sprung into lovely flowering.

Mrs. Bellamy felt strangely moved; she could not have said why. She actually kissed her daughter—rather a cold and awkward kiss, but even those were rare from her.

"You look very well," she said curiously. "What have you been doing to yourself?"

"Oh, nothing!" said Deirdre. But a glorious Something shone in her eyes, lurked in the little shadow at the corner of her mouth.

Mrs. Bellamy felt stirred and angry, and somehow rather wistful. Perhaps she remembered a day when she had looked like this, glowing with that subtle glory, that remote radiance.

"Where are you off to?" she asked, lingering on the steps.

"Gilly's Wood—it's lovely there now——"

It was on the tip of Mrs. Bellamy's tongue to tell her to wait until she changed her dress, and she would come too. Then she remembered—— It was too late to try and start all over again—— Too late—she ought to have remembered.

The old thin-lipped, twisted smile flickered over her beautiful face.

"Well, enjoy yourself," she said, and turning, went indoors.

Enjoy herself! Deirdre wanted to dance as she went along—the beautiful morning! The deep, clear blue of the sky, flinging its mantel over the woods and hills! All along the country road were May trees in flower, hanging great, sweet, rose-scarlet banners of bloom over the fence. Lilac and laburnum, in heavy, drooping purple tassels, and flickering yellow tongues of flame. This was Lord Liscarney's estate she was passing. There were the great wrought-iron gates that led to the house, with the two crouching stags guarding it on either side. There was the lodge—just like a fairy-tale cottage, all bulges and humps, with a clematis straggling over the porch. A very large and sleek black cat was sitting on the tiny bit of lawn as Deirdre passed, attending to his toilet operations.

She chirruped to him, because the morning was so lovely, and she loved all the world. He paused for a second, the tip of his pink tongue like a rose-leaf between his teeth, and regarded her with superb and slant-eyed Oriental indifference. Deirdre burst out laughing—he looked so funny. She danced the next

few steps, waving her arms above her head. Here was the stile, and the little footpath between the fields of long, deep grass and clover. Swallows soared and dipped over her head. White butterflies fluttered along, chasing each other in the sunshine, like a swirl of white rose-petals drifting on the wind. A Red Admiral was sunning himself on a moon daisy, flirting the gorgeous orange-red, black-splashed velvet of his wings.

She plunged from the sun-dappled meadows into the cool dimness of Gilly's Wood. Here all was still and dreaming and bird-haunted. Only the soft singing voice of the little stream broke the silence. The girl lingered a little on the tiny rustic bridge, looking down at the clear water hurrying along. At the bend of the tiny footpath leading to her clearing she paused, mischief in her eyes. He would be sitting under the big beech tree waiting for her, with his dark eyes watching the path. She would try and take him by surprise——

Deirdre tip-toed forward, then paused, aghast. The little clearing was empty. . . .

No, tall, slim figure, no gay voice that rang out in greeting. . . .

Empty—quite empty. . . .

Only for a second she paused. Then relief flooded her heart—her strained mouth relaxed. Of course he was hiding—probably behind the big beech tree, waiting to jump out and surprise her! She went on very softly, and tip-toed round the tree, laughter bubbling to her lips——

There was no one there——

Empty——

Deirdre stood there staring, with tragic eyes. Then she called sharply:

"Guy!"

And again:

"Guy! Guy!"

Silence—silence that seemed to close in on her, to leer at her like a living, tangible thing. She threw out her hands, as if to push it away. That unbearable silence——

Leering at her—pressing close—suffocating. . . . The girl suddenly felt icy cold. She sat down, a horrible sick dizziness swirling round her brain. . . .

A few remote, pleasant sounds slowly penetrated through the unbearable silence. The lazy tinkle of sheep bells. The droning of the bees. A sheep-dog barking from Gilly's Farm——

It wasn't silent any more, then. She could think now that heavy pall was lifted from her brain. She sat staring before her—staring into emptiness.

Funnily enough, it never dawned upon her that he might come again—that some accident had kept him away. She knew, with a strange feeling of fatalness, that he had gone out of her life. That she would not see him again. Guy—Guy—the name beat on her mind, like the ticking of a clock. His crooked curling smile, half mocking, half tender—never to see it again. His swift, amazing grace—the Winged Mercury, wonderfully poised and ardent—Guy——

Empty—escape——

Guy—Guy——

That ticking in her brain—beating, beating like small hammers——

So they would never know each other's name—they would go on, never knowing. He was gone out of her life, he and his laughter, and his swift strength, and leaping, hidden flame.

Deirdre did not know how long she sat there—she did not cry—her eyes were dry and burning. Just sat there staring. She found herself praying—she who never prayed. It was hardly a prayer—it was a cry, a fierce challenge, flung into the face of God——

"God help me to escape! You *must* help me to get out—to find him—I can't go on living without him! God, if You really are listening, help me! Do something to help me!"

Guy—Guy——

Empty. . . .

CHAPTER III

AUNT VI

I

Aunt Vi came down in June, on Deirdre's eighteenth birthday. She was absolutely shocked by the child's white face—the heavy mauve shadow beneath the large eyes.

"What have you been doing to Deirdre?" she asked her sister severely. "You'll have the child seriously ill if you don't look out. She looks done to death."

They were having their coffee underneath the huge cedar on the lawn. Beyond the pleasant shade were glimpses of smooth turf, sun-dappled, of flower-beds gay with butterfly phlox and grey-mauve spikes of lavender, and tall rosetted spires of hollyhocks.

Aunt Vi, solid and large and comfortable, sprawled untidily in a white wicker chaise-longue. Mrs. Bellamy lay in a becoming attitude, her dark head against a pile of scarlet cushions. The thickly laced boughs overhead laid cool fingers of shadow on her white frock.

She met her sister's fierce and monocled glare with the innocent eyes of a hurt child.

"I haven't been doing anything to her, Vi. Don't be absurd. All I know is that I met her one morning early in May, absolutely radiant—blooming with happiness. I remember how it struck me—that sort of light shining in her. And she came home afterwards like a ghost—a little white face, and heavy eyes—all the bloom knocked off her. It quite worried me ——"

"Um——" said Aunt Vi. She turned her shrewd gaze upon her sister's face, and was surprised to find that she was sincere. It was not like Mrs. Bellamy to be worried by anything, particularly by her eldest daughter. "Where did she go that morning?"

"To Gilly's Wood—she told me——"

"Um," said Aunt Vi again, and lit a cigarette.

Meanwhile she thought rapidly. Of course it was obvious that the child had not been alone in Gilly's Wood. Still, that did not concern her. She blew a smoke ring, and said suddenly:

"I want you to lend Deirdre to me for a bit——"

"'Lend her'?" Mrs. Bellamy was startled. She looked at her sister warily—sideways, under her lashes, like a nervous animal.

Violet Strangways continued, affecting to watch her smoke rings as they curled on the still air in faint lilac whirls and eddies and spirals, but in reality watching Mrs. Bellamy covertly.

"Deirdre is eighteen to-day, Cynthie. It's time she came out and had a little enjoyment like other girls. Frankly, she hasn't had much so far, poor little soul—I should love to have her for as long as you can

spare her. It will do her good, and me too. I shouldn't be surprised if she made quite a sensation—she's beautiful, you know, Cynthia——"

Mrs. Bellamy looked away, over the sunny lawn to the green tree-tops of the orchard, and the mellow red walls of the kitchen garden, where peach and plum and pear trees spread themselves in neat fans, nailed to the warm brick. She seemed to hesitate a little before speaking.

"I suppose you think I've been a rotten mother, Vi?"

Aunt Vi did not shilly-shally—it was characteristic of her that she came straight to the point.

"Honestly, my dear," she said bluntly, "you have ——"

Mrs. Bellamy still stared at the lawn and the flowers and the fruit trees—anywhere but at the florid, kindly face of her sister.

"I know I have. Some women are born to be perfect mothers—you, Vi, for instance, would have loved to have had about eight children. Instead of which you've got none. Funny, isn't it? Do you remember how you used to love dolls and I hated them? Even then I used to prefer draping myself in the tablecloth and pretending to be the Queen of Sheba!" She laughed—a curiously flat, mirthless laugh. Vi wondered if she was not a little unhappy about it in her heart. "I married Ralph for his money. Don't try and look shocked, Vi—you knew it all the time. I never loved him—I don't think I've ever loved anyone properly in my whole life. It's my fault, of course.

My children hate me, and I hate them—I seem to have just missed everything in life by some joke of the gods there be. Just missed everything——"

"But you bargained for money," said Violet Strangways bluntly. "And you've got it——"

"Yes, I've got it. Although to tell you the truth, Ralph's firm is suffering rather heavily. Still, that's straying away from the point—— You want Deirdre to stay with you, Vi?"

Aunt Vi nodded, still watching Mrs. Bellamy intently. She felt vaguely that something in her sister was struggling, like a flower sending up shoots to the light.

"I should be almost fond of Deirdre if it wasn't that I was jealous of her." She seemed to delight in being painfully frank. "I'm cursed with a violent temper and a jealous nature—well, I needn't tell you that, Vi—you've seen enough of both. But Deirdre is so extraordinarily beautiful—much more so than I ever was—that I nearly hate her sometimes. Does that sound very dreadful, Vi?"

"Only rather foolish," said Vi gently. She pitied, while she despised her sister.

"Besides that, she makes me look so old—a great girl of eighteen. That's why I've kept her in the background so far, and I'm sure, Vi, that you are despising me thoroughly——"

"I am," said Vi amiably. "But I suppose you can't help being a fool. Still, why you dress her so abominably I don't know——"

"Oh, anything does for the nursery. And honestly,

the bills there are to meet in this household are dreadful. It is only by a miracle that I manage to dress at all decently."

Mrs. Strangways studied the charming figure against the scarlet cushions—its exquisitely embroidered white gown, its pointed buckskin shoes. Her kind eyes hardened.

"You're a bit of a little sweep, Cynthie," she observed frankly. "You always have been—in streaks. I wonder why?"

"Oh well, every family has to have its black sheep," said Cynthia. "And you have a much better time if you're wicked——"

"You're not wicked—I shouldn't mind that—but you're mean, and—what's the word I want?—small. That's it—small in all your jealousies and outlooks and aims. I wish you weren't."

Mrs. Bellamy did not seem to mind this frank summing up of her character. Instead she smiled a little maliciously.

"Cheer up, Vi. Anyway, you make up for my failings. You're big—in every way!"

Aunt Vi remained placid.

"But I've gone down immensely, my dear, since I used that patent medicine Mrs. Harcourt recommended. I lost over a stone in no time—— Do you notice any difference?"

Mrs. Bellamy's half-shut eyes flickered rapidly over the large, comfortable figure in the wicker chaise-longue. Aunt Vi was a person who did not show to advantage in hot weather. Her hair was sticking in

wet wisps to her forehead. She seemed to melt, rather than sit, into her chair, like a wobbly pink blanc-mange.

Mrs. Bellamy was aware, complacently, sleekly, of her own coolness, of the slim lines of her, as she curled like a sinuous, purring kitten among her scarlet cushions.

"I think there is certainly a difference," she lied sweetly. "Have you tried those reducing crystals—I forget their name? Halloa, who's this coming across the lawn?"

She raised herself on one elbow and peered through the overhanging boughs that made a sort of green tent round them.

Mrs. Strangways hastily followed up the scent.

"I wish you could remember, Cynthie, I am always eager to try anything new. Haven't you got the name anywhere?"

"I believe I saw it in this week's *Tatler,*" said Mrs. Bellamy. "Why—it's Terence Liscarney—and Mr. Wycome—! Terry! Here we are under the cedar!"

Two young men bent their heads and entered the cool shade. They blinked for a second—coming out of the glare into the green dimness.

Mrs. Bellamy stretched out a hand.

"How nice of you to come! Have you brought your racquets? Good! We'll have a sett after you've rested a bit. Terry, you know my sister, don't you?"

"Oh, rather!" said Terry Liscarney smiling. "How cool it is here—I feel very lazy!"

He was a very tall, big young man of about twenty-

three years old—not especially good-looking—a very fair specimen of the average Englishman. His eyes were his best feature—vividly blue eyes that looked at the world squarely and frankly, with a gay sort of camaradie. When he laughed—and Terry Liscarney seemed made for laughter—little wrinkles puckered up the corners of his eyes and twisted his large mouth into the funniest grimace in the world. His friend, Gervase Wycome, was a complete contrast. He was small and dark and slim, with a pointed, faunish face and narrow, nervy hands. On seeing him you thought that he must be rather clever—and he was, in an erratic, brilliant way. His caricatures were really clever—he had an uncanny way of casting one brief keen glance at you, then a rapid stroke or two, a dash, a wiggle—and there you were, mercilessly held up to the public eye on the point of Wycome's pencil. He was a little cruel in his caricatures, but to do him justice he never meant to be. Most people disliked or even perhaps feared him. Terry Liscarney did neither—he adored him.

Aunt Vi liked Terry, but she did not quite know how to take Gervase Wycome. Anything that was not materialistic and comfortably ordinary vaguely disturbed Aunt Vi. She felt all the time that Wycome was laughing at her, and no one likes to be laughed at. She would have disliked him still more if she had seen the caricature he had furtively made of her on the back of an old envelope. It was only four strokes, and a wild scrawl, but it was Aunt Vi to the life—her fat, billowy face, the monocle that gave her

such an oddly rakish air, the straggling wisps of hair—— Certainly rather uncanny, this gift of Gervase Wycome's.

They drifted into a lazy conversation. Wycome did not like Mrs. Bellamy, so he relapsed into one of his morose, brooding silences. Mrs. Strangways seemed to melt even more into her chair—she sat limply, like a large putty Chinese god. So the conversation was mainly between Liscarney and Cynthia Bellamy. The latter seemed to have gained added brilliance. She looked beautiful, and was even witty in a delicate, airy way. Terry caught the flashing ball of wit she threw him—caught it, but failed to throw it back. He just sat listening, with his eyes admiringly on the lovely face against the scarlet cushions. Mrs. Bellamy liked this. She was the sort of woman who, given an admiring audience and no one to eclipse her, manages to shine with unusual brilliance.

Gervase Wycome watched them, his faunish face a little sneering. Suddenly the sneer was wiped off it —it became intent. Aunt Vi looked to see the cause of the intentness—standing just outside the Cedar's drooping shade was Deirdre.

Deirdre, with her swinging black plait—Deirdre, with her oddly weary eyes.

Gervase gave a small, excited exclamation and began hunting wildly in the pockets of his blazer. Terence Liscarney looked round, and Aunt Vi's shrewd gaze saw something leap up like a flame in his blue eyes, and as swiftly die out. Mrs. Bellamy frowned, and

her lips suddenly became one thin line. Aunt Vi was the first to speak.

"Come in out of the heat," she called. "You'll get sunstroke without a hat!"

Deirdre came, rather unwillingly. Both young men leapt up to offer her their seats. She shook her head smiling, and sat down on the arm of her aunt's chair. She looked at her mother rather apprehensively.

"I thought you were alone," she said in her rather boyish voice. "I came to ask you if Livvy and I may take our tea on the Downs. May we? For a treat for my birthday?"

"If you like," said Mrs. Bellamy ungraciously. "It will be very hot up there——"

Terry Liscarney spoke for the first time.

"Is it your birthday? How awfully jolly! How old are you?"

She looked at him with instant liking.

"Eighteen—it seems very old!"

"Does it? Ah, wait till you get an ancient bird like me! A picnic on the Downs—that sounds rather jolly——"

"Awfully jolly!" she said demurely, and shot him a mischievous glance.

Mrs. Bellamy said petulantly:

"Isn't she a great big thing? Eighteen! It doesn't seem possible."

She thought she heard Wycome chuckle, and looked round sharply, but he was furiously busy with a stub of pencil and an old envelope. She continued, trying to sound more gracious——

"I don't think you've met before, have you, Terry? My daughter, Deirdre—Lord Liscarney—Mr. Wycome——"

Deirdre nodded carelessly. She rather liked the look of the tall, fair young man, with his smooth tawny hair and his boyish eyes. There was a gay fellowship in those blue eyes, and something else which seemed to lurk behind the gaiety—something she could not quite see and which vaguely roused her curiosity.

Aunt Vi was speaking:

"Why don't you take your picnic to Gilly's Wood? I thought that was a favourite spot of yours."

Gervase Wycome's uncannily keen eyes saw a little flicker of pain shadow the translucent eyes. It was a mere flicker—a sort of mental wincing from a hurt suddenly laid bare. He sensed tragedy—yet what tragedy could there be in the mention of a wood—Gilly's Wood? He sat watching her, his nervy hands twitching. He saw the fine courage of her smile.

"It used to be," said Deirdre Bellamy.

Suddenly she remembered it all as vividly as if it had been yesterday—they had stood looking at each other, very intently, very simply, like two children taking grave-eyed stock of each other. She saw his thin, dark-skinned face, with its ardent young mouth, its audacious eyes—the sunlight falling in golden lozenges and patches on his dark head——

"Would you come if you heard me calling?"

"You know I would . . ."

Deirdre suddenly got up—she could not stay there

any longer. She wanted to get away from them all—her mother, Aunt Vi, Terence Liscarney, with his gay eyes, Wycome, hunched over his old envelope and stub of pencil. She managed to say fairly naturally:

"Well, I must go—Livvy's waiting for me——"

"Yes, run along," said her mother. "What about a sett now, Terry?"

Terence Liscarney had sprung to his feet, he had grabbed up Aunt Vi's rose-lined parasol, and unfurled it over Deirdre's head.

"You'll get sunstroke, you know, without a hat—sure to! Come on—I'll hold this over you to the house."

She found herself marching over the sunny lawn with him, her thoughts revolving in odd little circles—round and round—like a squirrel in a cage.

Absurd little circles——

She heard Terry talking, and managed to smile at him mechanically once or twice.

"I believe you *have* got a touch of sun," she heard him say. "Go in and sit down and I'll get you some water."

She said "The Tennis——" very feebly, but he marched her into the cool drawing-room, and insisted on bringing her a glass of water. The circles stopped and the mist cleared from her brain. She smiled at him.

"You *are* good! I believe I did get a touch——"

"Of course you did"—he was very severe——"Feeble thing to dash round without a hat."

"I suppose it is—still, I hate hats."

"Rotten things, I own! But on a day like this——"

"Well, I'll wear one on the Downs."

"Ah! the picnic. I've a good mind to come too—just to see what you do!"

"You've got to go and play tennis——"

His face clouded, then brightened.

"Never mind—you can invite me for another day. Go on—now! So that you can't get out of it!"

Deirdre laughed—she began to like him even more.

"Some day next week then——"

"*Which* day? Come on! I'm going to get a real, pukka invitation while I'm at it."

"Tuesday—on the Downs——"

"Cheerioh! Count on me! Will there be buns, or only bread and jam?"

"Buns!" she promised. "Buns with pink sugar on top. You know, the sort that melt through the paper. You can carry those!"

"Thanks!" He wrinkled his nose comically. "I can see I'm going to be made into a beast of burden in this act. Never mind, I shall eat them all when I get there! This is going to be some picnic!"

As a matter of fact it was destined never to take place. . . .

Out under the cedar tree Mrs. Bellamy looked at her sister. Wycome had gone to put up the net and find Terence. Aunt Vi looked back at her with the faded, rather protruding eyes that saw so much.

"Well," she said placidly, "a nice boy—that Terence. Seemed rather taken with Deirdre, I thought. As for that other man—Mr. Wycome—he quite

upsets me. I always feel as if I had a smut on my nose when he looks at me——"

Mrs. Bellamy picked up her racquet and stood drumming on the strings with one impatient hand. Then she said abruptly:

"You can have Deirdre if you like, Violet. She is getting too much for me. We'll arrange it all afterwards."

Mrs. Strangways watched her as she walked away towards the court, swinging her racquet carelessly. A satisfied smile creased her kind, pussy-cat face.

"Too pretty for her, she means! Oh well, it's all for the best. Now I'll be able to give the child a really good time, bless her. Dear me, how I shall enjoy it—having her all to myself!"

She heaved herself up from her chair, and lumbered heavily over the lawn towards the house. She caught sight of Deirdre walking down the path that led to the orchard gate. Terence was on one side of her, Wycome on the other, carrying a spirit-lamp in a basket. Olivia (swamped beneath the Mushroom) had a fat terrier pup under one arm, who was uttering staccato squeaks of protest, and a large, greasy paper bag under the other. They stopped at the gate, still talking. Deirdre was laughing—Aunt Vi saw her face under the broad hat all dimpling with mirth. "Bless her," she thought comfortably, "that's what *she* wanted —some gay young people to spoil her." Her thoughts glided into a pleasant backwater. "We shall have to have Terence Liscarney to see us in town—I wonder —it would be a very good thing——"

She left her pleasant conjectures to call to them: "Cynthia's waiting!"

Liscarney started and looked slightly ashamed. Gervase's mocking smile grew a shade deeper. Aunt Vi took her parasol from Terence and opened it over her head. It looked incongruously like a rose leaf fluttering over a large white elephant.

Terence pulled the puppy's velvety ears, and smiled at Deirdre.

"Well, cheer-oh," he said. "I hope you have a jolly time, and don't forget Tuesday. Save a bun or two for me, Olivia——"

Olivia enormously grinned.

She liked the big fair young man very much, but she was not sure that she did not like the small dark one even better. There was something in his dark, restless eyes that appealed to her. They looked as if they were going to laugh, but decided to sneer instead. But they only sneered for some people, she had discovered. When they looked at her they were very gentle, and there was a smile in them. She smiled back, her pink mouth stretching to an unbelievable width.

They stood and watched the two young men go off down the paved path, with its straggling border of Mrs. Sinkin's pinks—Olivia clasping her puppy, Deirdre looking thoughtfully after Terence's big, broad-shouldered figure, Aunt Vi, her hot face beaming under the rose-lined parasol.

She turned, and caught the girl by the hand.

"Such news, darling! You're coming to London

with me, and I'm going to bring you out, and give you such a good time! What do you say to that?"

Deirdre said nothing—she stared. Suddenly her eyes filled and her mouth quivered.

"Really and truly? *She* says so?"

"Really and truly! Will you enjoy it, Deirdre?"

"Oh, Aunt Vi!" Impulsively, she seized and kissed her. "I *knew* you'd help me! I said so! Oh, if you knew what it meant to me! I—I've prayed for it! *Escape!*"

Suddenly she was off, tearing down the path, long legs flying, long black plait swinging—Olivia, the puppy bumping against her ribs, followed. She caught her up some way down the road.

"Oh, Deirdre!" said Olivia, "*do* stop!"

At the mournful voice Deirdre paused, swinging her basket with a force that threatened to shoot the spirit-lamp and the saucepan on to the road.

"Was that true what Aunt V-vi said? Are you really g-g-going away? Oh dear, how beastly it will b-be without you!"

Deirdre was smitten with swift compunction at her own joy.

"Oh, Livvy darling, I'll be back soon. Or if I'm not you shall come up to me. But, Livvy, it's my dream come true! Escape, you know! Getting out of this to see the world! Fancy, I shall see St. Paul's! And Drury Lane! And Bond Street!"

"But I shan't!" said poor Olivia mournfully.

"Yes, you shall—very soon, Livvy dear! Oh, I'm sorry to be so happy, but it's so perfectly beau-

tiful! Give me a hug, darling old girl, and let's be happy!"

They embraced solemnly and tightly in the middle of the road, looking at each other sentimentally. The puppy, wedged in between the greasy paper bag (which he consoled himself by licking) and the spirit-lamp basket, uttered a small and squeaky howl, which made them laugh.

"Put him down, Livvy," said Deirdre. "There are no motors along here, and we're just going to turn off into the fields——"

She started off again, running, skipping, swinging her basket. Words seemed to beat time to her dancing feet.

Guy—Guy—Guy——

Escape—escape——

She swung her basket up in an ecstasy of joy. The saucepan shot out with a crash into the ditch, and the sugar-topped biscuits, which had been ingeniously packed inside it, scattered far and wide among the cow parsley and the long grass. Olivia hurried up, bursting with laughter, and the two sat down in the ditch to forget their troubles in picking up the biscuits. . . .

That evening as they were walking back through the summer dusk to Greyfriars, Gervase Wycome suddenly rummaged in his pockets and fished out an old envelope.

"What do you think of that?" he asked Terence.

Terence looked at it. A few hasty strokes and a bold line or two—but it was Deirdre sitting there with

her long legs crossed, smiling her brave, fine smile, with the little shadow of pain in her eyes. Gervase had just managed to catch it before it went. Silence for a minute, then Terence said slowly:

"I wonder why the kid was looking like that?"

Gervase said nothing—he was looking at the lighted windows of the little fairy-tale lodge that glowed like goblin lanterns through the blue gauze of the twilight.

"Do you want this?" asked Terence suddenly.

"Not particularly," said Wycome.

He watched Terence out of the corner of his eye, saw him put the envelope carefully into his note-case, and back again into his breast pocket.

Mr. Wycome found this rather disturbing.

II

It was all very exciting.

Deirdre found everything connected with her flitting tinged with thrilling romance, from the pair of shoes which were to have the honour of carrying her for the first time on London pavements to the imposing new trunk which stood in her little bedroom, looking patronisingly at the shabby carpet and the deal washstand.

Aunt Vi had departed for town the next day in a great state of excitement and heat to get things ready for her niece. She had left parting instructions, delivered one minute before the train started.

"Don't get any new clothes, or anything. Can't get a decent rag down here. Your father told me to get you everything you want—he has given me carte

blanche. So we'll have a lovely time in town, fitting you out from top to toe. Good-bye, dear"—the guard waved his flag—"Tuesday, and I'll meet you at Victoria. Don't forget"—the train was moving—"not to buy a thing! So much—cheaper—in—London!"

And Aunt Vi's beaming face was whirled out of sight.

Tuesday was there in no time. The week seemed to skurry along—all the days tumbled over each other in their hurry. Monday night—a disturbed one, as Olivia came in, in her nightgown, at two o'clock in the morning, and tearfully insisted on sleeping perilously on the edge of Deirdre's narrow bed for the rest of the night.

Tuesday morning—the old routine of bathing and dressing and eating—(or making a pretence of eating, anyway). Then the motor came to the door to take them to the station. The new and imposing trunk was carried downstairs and strapped on to the luggage rack at the back. Olivia and Roly were coming to see her off. Her mother was in bed—she went in to say goodbye.

The sunlight danced on the pale grey walls, glanced on the fat little gilt Cupids holding up the canopy of the bed. Their plump faces seemed to smirk at her.

Mrs. Bellamy lay in bed, her breakfast tray beside her, her letters tossed over the satin counterpane. Her face, between the heavy dark plaits, was very tired and rather drawn.

Deirdre did not even dislike her just then—she only felt a sort of pity for her—a pity that her life should

be so narrow and small, hemmed in as it was by Self-love, and Pleasure, and Wealth. Just one long round of getting dressed, and paying calls, and entertaining, and going to sleep in the brocade-hung French bed. There was no newness in life for her—she was not standing on the threshold of the world, looking out at all the beauty beckoning to her, as Deirdre was. She felt a sort of pity, and at the same time a little contempt.

"I've come to say good-bye," she said dutifully.

Mrs. Bellamy looked at the tall young figure in its cheap navy serge coat and skirt, at the flower-like face beneath the plain straw hat. In a week the child's face seemed to have filled out again, to have lost its hollows and tired expression, going back once more to its old curving beauty.

"Good-bye," she said unemotionally. "Give my love to Violet."

Deirdre bent over and kissed the soft cheek. She wished desperately that she could say something warm and loving and impulsive, or clasp long young arms round her mother. But she couldn't. The barrier between the two was unsurmountable.

So she just said:

"The car's waiting—I'll write—good-bye," and pressing Mrs. Bellamy's hand awkwardly, she went out.

The room was very still after she had gone. . . .

Mr. Bellamy was to take Deirdre up to town. He looked nervous and unhappy, and fidgeted all the way, drawing out his watch and putting it back again with a "plop!" like a conjurer. As they passed the stile that led to Gilly's Wood, Deirdre bent forward to look at

it—the green tree tops were waving gently against a pale turquoise sky.

Olivia pressed her hand stickily. It was all like a dream, and she wanted to laugh.

At the station Mr. Bellamy gave her an armful of magazines, and repeated the "tug and plop!" process, comparing his own watch with the grimy clock over the bookstall.

Deirdre looked at him with tranquil, amused eyes. She felt rather sorry for him, too—in fact, she was sorry for everyone who was not going forth like she was, a young knight errant, ready to conquer the world! She was glad when the train came in. It steamed in leisurely, as if it knew it was late, but didn't care a hang. Mr. Bellamy made a dart for an empty carriage, and shot himself into it, sinking with a sigh of relief into a corner seat. Deirdre lingered on the platform. Roly, after a careful glance round to see that no one was looking, nearly strangled her with a large hug, at the same time pressing a dirty matchbox, that contained four very fine "Woolly Bear" caterpillars, having an orgy of lettuce leaf within their cardboard abode, into her hand.

Olivia could say nothing—she just looked at her sister with tragic brown eyes, and squeezed her hand.

"Good-bye," said Deirdre. "You'll be good, won't you? Don't give Miss Jones any trouble, will you, Livvy? Thanks awfully for the Woolly Bears, Roly dear. I shall keep them in my bedroom. Good-bye —*do* write to me!"

Mr. Bellamy poked his head out of the window.

"Get in, Deirdre! The train's just going! Be quick—you'll be left behind!"

She got in to please him, and sat down in her corner. Roly climbed on to the step and made faces at her. The guard waved his green flag—the train, slowly and with great dignity, was gliding out of the station. Olivia and Roly trotted alongside, keeping up a running fire of parting injunctions.

"Don't forget to feed them every day, will you, Deirdre? They'll die if you don't!"

"Give Auntie my love, and—oh, do send me some Fuller's chocolates—I like the hard kind best——"

"They like a little exercise, and"—the train was gathering speed—"lettuce leaf—will do—to—feed—them! Or cabbage—for—a change!"

"Good-bye—good-bye—hard ones, mind!—only—once—a—day—cabbage. Good-bye!"

They were whirled out of sight—Roly, his grubby little face beaming, Olivia, lanky and untidy-looking in her gingham dress, the Mushroom hanging back from her tragic face by its flapping elastic.

Out of sight——

Escape—escape!

Deirdre settled down in her corner. Two other people had got into their carriage—an old lady, carrying a pug dog with a lolling pink tongue, and an immaculate young man in a grey suit, who was reading *The Motor-Car*. He was staring at her rather curiously, she thought, and she flushed a little, putting Roly's match-box into her pocket. Mr. Bellamy was already shrouded in *The Times*. She looked out of

the window, at Bamberly Parish Church, sunning its grey walls among its rock-haunted elms, at the cricket field, where the mowing machine made a pleasant, sleepy whir on the morning air, at the cottage by the level crossing, with its garden aglow with phlox and fat pink Canterbury bells.

Escape—escape—escape——

The train seemed to be singing it as it rushed along. She turned round and met the young man's curious gaze again. She picked up *Pearson's Magazine* and tried to read it. The print danced up and down before her eyes—she could not have made sense of a single paragraph.

Escape—escape—escape——

She put it down again, and turned to her window. The train was gathering speed—hurtling through green leafy tunnels, between sweeps of sunlit pastures and little copses. Deirdre looked out at it all with unseeing eyes. Names seemed to be slipping in between her and the landscape—vague, delightful, disturbing names——

Piccadilly—Tunis—Marble Arch—Venice—Granada—all waiting for her, gloriously waiting.

That brought her back to Guy. She thought happily:

"I'm going to find him! I feel it! At every theatre and dance I go to I shall look for him! It will be just like Longfellow's 'Evangeline'—though, of course, it won't end unhappily——"

The supreme confidence of Youth!——

She relapsed into delightful dreams.

She and Guy together—always together—going together to sunny lands, seeing warm-skinned dusky faces, hearing strange forgotten tongues. They would be so happy—so very, very happy. Stray little pictures drifted through her imagination—she and Guy in a Persian rose-garden—sailing up the Nile, as Cleopatra had done centuries ago—buying violets, and fragrant jonquils, and great bunches of sun-warmed narcissus, from one of the old, brown-faced wrinkled flower-sellers on the steps of the Plaza de Spagna. She did not think about Love—it never entered into her childish dreams. They would just be together, as it had been decreed by Destiny since the beginning of all things. And they would be happy—oh, so absurdly, gloriously happy! . . .

It seemed in an incredibly short time that the train ran into Victoria Station.

She leant out of the window, sniffing the smoky air as if it was the nectar of the gods. All the porters, waiting in a line—and the rows of taxis—she wondered hopefully if they would take a taxi. And there was Aunt Vi, very wonderfully dressed in grey, waving her absurd little sunshade like a Morse flag.

The next few minutes were dream-like. Her father, after handing her thankfully into Mrs. Strangways' charge, faded away into the crowd—the fat, shiny trunk was dug out of the *mêlée* in the luggage van—Aunt Vi, chattering like a monkey in a palm tree, led the way to the waiting car, a big, shining, sleek, grey Daimler—(no taxi, then, thought Deirdre regretfully).

Then they were off, sliding through the crowded streets with a skill which delighted Deirdre. She looked all round the roomy grey and silver interior—at the various fascinating little switches, which controlled the electric light, and shot forth from some magical source a tiny glass-topped table, just as if it were a fairy-tale equipage. Then she met the shrewd, kind gaze of Aunt Vi's pale blue eyes from beneath the grey hat, and suddenly flung herself impulsively into her arms.

"Aunt Vi, darling, it is so ripping to be with you! It's just like a dream! Fancy being in London! *Look* at all those 'buses—can we go on top of a 'bus one day, Auntie?"

"As often as you like, my dear. If you knew how I loved having you! It will be just like having a daughter of my own——"

"You perfect old *darling!* I say, when shall we start shopping?"

Aunt Vi laughed at her excitement.

"This afternoon, if you're not tired, darling. And this evening I've booked two stalls for 'Cairo.' "

Deirdre heaved an ecstatic sigh.

"I think you're going to spoil me, Auntie Vi——"

"Well, I think it's time someone ought to! And I'm going to pack all the spoiling, and fun, and laughter I can into the time you're with me. Look, there's Marble Arch——"

Deirdre looked, and suddenly she was glad that there were waving trees, and green grass, and gay flower-beds in the midst of London's towering buildings and grimy chimney pots.

"When I'm a little homesick for the country," she explained, "I can go there, and walk on the grass, and sit under the trees. And I should *love* to sail a boat on the Round Pond, but I suppose I'm too big for that now——"

She sounded so wistfully regretful that Mrs. Strangways could not contain her laughter.

"Never mind, darling—you'll have other things to make up for it. Here we are—home——"

The Daimler stopped before a charming white house in a fashionable street off the park. It was not so big as its neighbours, but it had a sort of charm that had attracted Mrs. Strangways when she bought it. Houses are the same as people—some attract, others repel. Deirdre loved 64, Clement Street at once—it was all so fresh and immaculate, with its green sunblinds and the gay window-boxes, full of straggling pink geraniums and stiff, demure marguerites.

She still felt as if she was walking in a delightful, unsubstantial dream, and that any moment she might wake up to the darkness, and the glimmering square of her window, and the wind in the wistaria leaves outside. She followed Aunt Vi through a big, cool hall, up the wide oak stairs that shone with a beautiful, subdued lustre. Aunt Vi threw open a door and drew her in.

"This is your room, dear—mine is next door, so you won't be lonely."

It was not at all like the green and gold room at home, but it was all white wood and crisp chintzes patterned in quaint spires of foxgloves. There was

a low white bookcase, invitingly full, and a couch by the window full of plump, squashy black cushions, and a dull blue china bowl of dumpy, greeny-orange mignonette on the dressing-table.

Deirdre went to the window and looked at the green tree tops of the Park, and the wrought-iron gates of the house opposite, and a little florist's boy who was going whistling along with a tray of scarlet peonies on his head. She watched him all down the street, he and his flaming flowers. . . .

Then she turned—Aunt Vi was watching her with affectionate, anxious eyes.

"Aunt Vi, I just love this room, and you, and London! Why, it's just like the country—the green trees, and the mignonette, and the foxglove chintz! I've never had such a darling room before!" She took off her hat, running her fingers through the heavy black masses of her hair. "Do you know, I think London is such a friendly place! You could never feel lonely in it, because it sort of makes friends with you. It's a witch—no wonder Englishmen abroad long for it! Aunt Vi darling, I want to explore London."

"You shall—do whatever you like, Deirdre—London and I want to make you happy."

"You couldn't help it if you tried. You're one of those comfy people who exude happiness. Not the prickly sort, like——" She stopped short, and bent her face over the mignonette. "I'm going to be happy—I'm going to be happy——!"

Lunch—a delightful little meal, served in the Chinese

dining-room, with its bright yellow walls, with panels let in at intervals of orange trees and mandarines and tipsy pagodas leaning over sleepy rivers, spanned by lotus-hung bridges.

Deirdre did not talk very much—she let Aunt Vi chatter—just sat there taking in the shining silver and glass, reflected in the polished wood, the big silver bowl of violets in the centre. Her thoughts went to Roly and Olivia, having their meal in the schoolroom, off common china and indifferent napery, and her mouth hardened. She was out of it herself, anyway, and she didn't mean to return. . . . Escape!

III

After lunch they got their things on, and at Deirdre's request took the 'bus to Regent Street.

Aunt Vi could not bear 'buses—they shook and jolted her—but for Deirdre's sake she bore it bravely. Indeed it was worth it—seeing her vivid, eager face, her restless, excited eyes. People looked after her in the street, stared at her in the 'bus. Aunt Vi noticed with relief that she was supremely unconscious of it all. Yet one could not help looking—her face was almost startling in its arresting beauty.

"If people stare at her now," thought Aunt Vi nervously, "in that cheap coat and skirt and little sailor hat, what on earth will they do when I've dressed her?"

Aloud she said:

"There's no time to get things made for you—you want them at once. Afterwards we'll take you to

my dressmaker's, but to-day ready-made things will have to do——"

They walked down Regent Street—Regent Street looking its best in the warm sunshine. Deirdre was not allowed more than one look in every shop—she resolved privately to come by herself and spend hours shop-gazing. At Liberty's she paused—fascinated, bewildered. All the colour and beauty and fine workmanship in the world seemed to be massed behind the plate-glass windows. There was a length of shimmering rose-scarlet stuff, draped round a huge Chinese god—gold-banded cushions, tall jade jars—sandalwood and silk, ivory, and soft-toned Persian rugs——Beauty. . . .

"Come along, dear," said Aunt Vi, "we have such a lot to do——"

She tore herself away reluctantly. There were fresh wonders ahead, though. A large jeweller's—chains of jade or crystal, trays of unset diamonds, coldly flawless, great rubies and emeralds set in dull gold, opals in platinum like clotted moonshine. They glowed like fire in the sunshine.

"*Oh!*" said Deirdre, her nose against the glass.

A man standing near glanced casually at her and smiled at her childish delight.

Aunt Vi was impatient.

"You can come again to-morrow, darling! *Do* hurry!"

Deirdre turned, her face radiant.

"Here I am, Auntie dear. But isn't it wonderful? Those emeralds—I like them best of all, I think. And

that big sapphire star set round with pearls! I should like—oh—look at that flower shop!"

More beauty—expensive beauty—long-stemmed giant roses, velvety scarlet, great blowsy peonies, delicate love-in-a-mist lilies of the valley and Russian violets, strange tawny orchids, white-throated, purple flecked——

This time Mrs. Strangways kept a firm grip on her niece's arm.

"If we are going to do any shopping to-day you can't stop and window-gaze. You've no idea the things you want! Of course, we can't get them all to-day, but a few, anyway——"

They entered a big store—were whirled from floor to floor in a fascinating lift. The next few hours were dream-like. Deirdre remembered buying silk stockings —enough, to her bewildered eyes, to last a lifetime—delightfully unpractical underclothes, *crêpe de chine,* or finest lawn, embroidered evidently by fairy hands, finely tucked or scalloped—a rose-pink kimono, embroidered with drooping wistaria and a flight of silver storks.

They left the stores and took a taxi—were whirled to other big shops. A shoe shop—dizzily she remembered trying on and buying pair after pair of heavenly shoes—suède, buckskin, crocodile—a pair of black satin with scarlet heels—absurd little rosy mules, lined with white fur. Then to a bewildering place which turned out to be a hat shop—vistas of grey carpet, gilt Louis XV chairs, an elegant, extremely terrifying apparition in black satin who, after conferring with

Aunt Vi, mysteriously returned with an armful of heaven-inspired hats, which it dawned upon Deirdre's dazed brain were meant for her. A large white one, which looked absurdly simple and turned out to be horribly dear—a thing which seemed to be composed out of a wisp of tulle and a huge rose—it all struck Deirdre as extremely funny. She looked at herself in the long glass, the hat on her head—a Mercury-like, winged affair—so absurdly contrasting with her simple coat and skirt that she could not help laughing.

"How awfully funny I look, don't I?" she said childishly. She looked again at her tall, slim reflection, and giggled softly to herself.

They made their last visit, where Deirdre submitted to being tried on over and over again, her mind straying longingly to Bath buns and ices.

Only once did she really emerge from the sort of stupor which possessed her. Then it was at the sight of an evening dress which the show-woman was showing to Aunt Vi. It was the exact colour of her eyes —a clear, deep green, the skirt slightly wired, spreading like a flower.

"I want that," she said.

Aunt Vi, whose ideas of evening wear for the *jeune fille* strayed innocently in the direction of white tulle and rosebuds, demurred:

"Isn't green a little old for you, dear?"

The show-woman took Deirdre's side.

"But no, madam—green was a most fashionable colour—would the young lady try it on?"

The young lady would—after one look at her in it, Aunt Vi gave in.

Then it was home, and tea in the cool, flower-filled drawing-room. Presiding over the tea-tray, Aunt Vi ceased to be the automatic stranger she had been all the afternoon—absorbed in the purchase of afternoon frocks, choosing with furrowed brow, between two hats—and became herself again, fatly placid, solidly comfortable.

"I'm tired," she said, heaving a gigantic sigh, "extraordinarily tired."

Deirdre looked at her sharply. There was a certain grey look about Mrs. Strangways' usually florid face—it seemed so tired and drawn that the girl felt a stab of swift fear.

"Darling, do you feel all right?"

"Yes—yes—it's nothing. We've had such a busy afternoon—a rush always makes me a little queer. And all those stairs at Whiteleys! My heart isn't what you would call good, and stairs are so tiring—I wish we'd taken the lift now."

Deirdre was all compunction.

"Will you go and rest, Aunt Vi? Please, please do. You mustn't go to the theatre to-night——"

"Mustn't go? Fiddlesticks! A cup of tea and a rest, and it will pass off at once."

To Deirdre's relief this proved the case, and in a short time Mrs. Strangways was looking her normal self, and chatting away in her usual voluble style.

"Well," she said, smiling, "are you pleased with yourself?"

"Rather! But, Auntie, I feel horribly conscience-stricken—I'm sure I've made Daddy bankrupt!"

Aunt Vi made a small sound, rather deadened with sandwich, between a snort and a cluck.

"Rubbish! You're only getting what you *ought* to have! And you wouldn't have had anything unless I had whisked you away——"

"Like a fairy godmother. Aunt Vi, you're a darling! Are you sure I'm not worrying you to death?"

"My darling childie, you're giving me the treat of my life! By rights I should have had half a dozen daughters to fuss round, but instead I'm a lonely old woman, living by herself in a large, dull house. Since your uncle died I have been very lonely sometimes."

Deirdre, whose sole and blurred recollection of her American uncle was of someone with a loud voice, large spectatcles, and pockets full of candy, took Mrs. Strangways' large, soft hand and squeezed it between her own slender brown fingers.

Aunt Vi, who hated sentiment, recovered herself, and spoke briskly.

"So now I've got you to make a fuss of, and I'm happy! Bless you. I'm going to be a proper match-making mamma, and have the time of my life! I'm going to give a little dance for you very soon—would you like Terence Liscarney to come?"

Deirdre started, and turned candid eyes on her aunt.

"Oh dear, I absolutely forgot him! I promised to go for a picnic to-day with him, too—what will he think of me?"

"You can write and explain. Anyway, he'll be coming up to town soon—he's only down at Greyfriars for a week or so, I believe."

"Doesn't he live down there all the year round?"

"Oh no—that's his house opposite—the one with the big wrought-iron door. Do you know his mother?"

"I didn't know he had one! Why, I didn't even know him until a week ago——"

Her mind skipped off the boring subject of the Liscarneys to the exciting one of the present.

"But a dance—honestly and truly, Aunt Vi? For me?"

"For you! Do you like dancing?"

The happy eyes clouded.

"I don't know—I've never learnt. We didn't go to parties at home, you know. But I think I *could* dance—I sort of feel dancey!"

"Oh, well, you can easily learn—modern dances are very easy. And your hair must go up, of course—this evening!"

Deirdre made a comical face.

"What a pity! It's so nice in a plait, and comfy—no hairpins jabbing into my head. How Roly and Livvy would laugh to see me——!"

IV

That night she put on the new green dress, which had just been sent home. Parker, Aunt Vi's maid, came in and helped her to dress, and did her hair for her. It was all very bewildering and exciting. But

even Aunt Vi was unprepared for the new Deirdre who awaited her in the softly lighted drawing-room. A startling, fairy-tale princess of a Deirdre, with her white neck and arms, and the vivid green dress spreading out like a flower round her.

"Will I do?" she asked, smiling. "I feel awfully queer, and my head seems freighted with hairpins, and I know it's going to fall down, but if you approve, I'm happy."

"You look lovely, my dear, and I'm proud of you."

"Are you really? How happy I feel! Do you know that I stood in front of the glass for ages, just smirking at my petticoat and silk stockings! I rather wanted to come down like that—it's so nice hearing the little rustle of the silk against my ankles as I walk!" She danced across the room, admiring her slender silken ankles and narrow brocade shoes. "It's just like Cinderella, Auntie! You're the fairy godmother and I'm Cinders, brought from her fireside to the ballroom!"

"And the Prince?"

"Ah, the Prince——" Suddenly she stopped dancing.

"I don't know where he is, but I'm going to find him! Of course I'm going to find him!"

And unconsciously her arms went out in a wide, sweeping gesture——

Aunt Vi wondered still more, but very wisely she said nothing.

They had dinner, and afterwards went to His Majesty's.

Deirdre, the green dress hidden beneath a silvery

cloak, was in mad spirits. She made airy sallies, darted delicate shafts of wit—all with that gay, childish air of enjoyment that Aunt Vi loved to see. She peered out of the window of the car at the lights of the theatres and restaurants, glowing through the twilight. Once she kissed Aunt Vi impulsively and said like a child:

"I'm so happy! *So* happy!"

His Majesty's pleased her—she liked the marble-paved foyer, the softly lighted corridors. They were late; the orchestra was just finishing the Overture as they took their seats in the third row of the stalls. The curtain rose, and Deirdre entered the Gates of Romance.

More than one head was turned sympathetically towards the third row of the stalls, as her laughter rang out clear and spontaneous as a child's. She watched the feast of colour and movement with rapt eyes—leaning forward a little with parted lips. "Cairo" bored Aunt Vi—she preferred something a trifle heavy and dramatic—but one glance at Deirdre's face amply repaid her. The lights went up, and the girl turned, smiling.

"Isn't it lovely!" she said. "Don't you love that pretty girl—Fedora Rossini, and——"

She paused suddenly, and Aunt Vi followed the direction of her startled gaze. A young man had just entered one of the boxes, and was standing talking to a fair woman in rose-pink. His face was half averted, so Aunt Vi could only see that he was tall and slim, with dark hair and a well-shaped head. Then she

looked at Deirdre again—the girl's face was startling in its radiance—she half rose, her eyes eager. Then the young man turned.

Aunt Vi was almost frightened by the sudden change in Deirdre's face—it was as if a hand had passed over it, wiping out all the happiness. The weary eyes, the quivering mouth——

"My dear, what is it?"

She forced a small, brave smile.

"Nothing, Auntie, thanks. I only thought that I saw someone I knew in one of the boxes——"

She sat very still for the rest of the performance, looking with unseeing eyes at the brilliant stage, seeing in her imagination the bluebell-painted hollows of Gilly's Wood.

Hearing a young voice say steadily:

"We were always together—I loved you——"

Absurd tears suddenly sprang to her eyes. The violins were wailing like voices calling from beneath the sea. A voice began to sing—she heard it mechanically—

"Love in my heart he lit, then fared away . . ."

Love . . .

"We were always together—I loved you——"

But it wasn't love—it couldn't be love. She almost laughed at the idea. It was nothing so common as love. It was just that they had been together—sometime—somewhere—and that nothing could keep them apart.

"Not even Death," thought Deirdre, her hands clasped tightly in her lap.

She did not feel sentimental—she merely felt that, as surely as she was sitting in His Majesty's theatre, third row of the stalls, Fate or Destiny or God, or whatever you like to call it, had taken the thread of the boy's life and the thread of her own and bound them irrevocably close together. She felt the calm philosophical spirit of the Arab, when he says, shrugging his shoulders—"It is the will of Allah——"

Destiny, smiling inscrutably, holding the threads of their lives in her hand. Suddenly she felt very small, and lonely, and frightened, looking at that wise, ageless, inscrutable smile. But words sang in her brain—a string of vaguely familiar words that somehow took shape and form. A strong hand on her troubled thoughts.

"Many waters cannot quench love neither can the floods drown it——"

Then a sudden, triumphant voice:

"For Love is strong as Death——"

All blended in with that steady young voice:

"We were always together . . . I loved you. . . ."

CHAPTER IV

QUEST

I

THERE were such a lot of things to do in the days that followed that Deirdre seemed to live a lifetime in a week. She liked it all amazingly—the shopping, the theatres, the gay life and bustle—but best of all she liked exploring London. She liked Bond Street, with its gay air of silken extravagance—she liked to go early to Covent Garden and bring home armfuls of dew-wet roses, or baskets of big sun-warmed strawberries—she liked to sit in Westminster Abbey and listen to the choir boys' clear, sweet voices. All this she liked, but Aunt Vi, alas, did not.

Aunt Vi loathed churches, and old buildings, and markets—she preferred to stay comfortably in the present, and not delve about in the past.

"How you like it I don't know," she said despairingly. "Most girls prefer *matinées* and *thés dansants* to poking about looking for the site of Tyburn Tree, or sniffing corpses in a vault."

Deirdre sighed, torn between laughter and gravity.

"Can't I go alone, Auntie Vi?"

"Alone? Cer-tainly not! My dear child, you'd be

murdered or kidnapped in some of those awful back alleys you dragged me into. I knew a girl——"

She rambled off into long and harrowing details.

So it came about that Terence Liscarney became her companion and escort. It all happened in the most natural way in the world.

He had followed Deirdre up to town on the Friday of that week, and the following Tuesday he and his mother came to call. Deirdre had been out, under the dragon-like eye of the grim Parker. She came in like a breath of flowery air—tall and slim in the demure little fawn stockinette suit—an audacious felt hat casting a shadow over her green eyes. She was introduced to Lady Liscarney—a tall, masculine-faced woman whom, for all her effusiveness, Deirdre instinctively disliked. There was something lying latent at the back of the hard, grey eyes which put her on her guard. She turned with a feeling of relief to meet the friendly glance of Lord Liscarney's blue eyes.

"Well," he said, "you sinner, doing me out of my picnic!"

He had pulled out a chair for her on to the balcony, cool and pleasant with its green sun-blinds, its flowers——

"I really am awfully sorry—I forgot all about it!"

"Worse and worse! You should have remembered it every day when you woke up, and dreamt about it every night! My heart is broken!"

"Never mind—I'm awfully glad to see you——!"

"Well, that's consoling, but still, I haven't got over the loss of those sugar buns yet!"

"Cheer up—we'll have an honest-to-goodness picnic some day to make up for our last one."

His eyes wandered over her, with frank and unconcealed admiration.

"I can't get over it," he said. "A week or two ago you were a kid in a short dress with your hair down, and here you are, looking as if you'd worn a Paris gown and high-heeled shoes every day of your life!"

She stuck out a slender foot in its fragile casing of fawn suède, and smiled at it with a funny little air of complacence.

"Don't you like the effect?"

"Oh, yes, rather—stunning! But you look so extremely grown up that I suppose I must give up teasing you——"

"Oh, *don't!*" she implored. "I love it! And I'm not really grown up, you know—I'm terrified that my hair will fall down!"

"Let it! I rather liked that long pig-tail thing——! Well, what have you been doing with yourself?"

She told him, her eyes sparkling.

Five minutes later Terence Liscarney was assuring her that he revelled in "sniffing corpses," and exploring bits of old London, and poking about in narrow lanes and alleys. In fact, from his enthusiasm one might have gathered that it was the passion of his life. So quite naturally he slipped into the position of escort. Aunt Vi, relieved and not a little complacent, was allowed to stay at home in comfort while they explored London together.

Deirdre found Terry a vastly superior companion to

Aunt Vi. He dug out ponderous and dusty works on old London from his library, which they studied fervidly. He knew a hundred and one interesting places where he took her. One day he took her to lunch at a little Italian restaurant in a back street of Soho, where greasy, dark-eyed Italians sang love songs to the accompaniment of plucked guitars, and the cooking and wine were remarkably good. Deirdre sat entranced, looking at the gay crowd round her, listening to the soft, wonderfully sweet voices.

"Caro mio ben, credimi almen,
Senza di te languisce il cor,
Il tuo fedel sospira ognor,
Cessa crudel, tanto rigor . . ."

Neither of them ate much—so occupied was Deirdre in looking round her, and Terence in watching her vivid face.

Another day they went on top of a 'bus to Richmond Park, where they sat under the trees and picnicked royally, with much laughter, and fed the deer afterwards. Then they talked, sitting in the mellow shade—or rather Deirdre talked, and Terence listened, with his eyes on her face, like a nice, affectionate dog. Deirdre began to be very fond of him—he took the place occupied by Howard in her heart. A big brother —someone solid and dependable and not too brilliant—that was how she regarded him. They played together, with London as their playground.

One day they were feeding the pigeons outside St.

Paul's, having purchased a large bag of corn on the way. Deirdre had never done this before, and her delight when the pigeons came all round her in a cloud of swirling wings was child-like. She flung handfuls among them, noting with keen pleasure the shimmering petunia and flame green feathers on quivering throat and breast, that glistened in the sunlight.

"Here——!" said Terence. "Let me have a handful —that fat fellow over there isn't getting any." He tossed the remainder of the bag to his protégé, laughing like a boy.

Deirdre said suddenly:

"You're a dear, Terry, you know——" A warm flush stained her white skin, and she made a funny little grimace of apology. "Lord Liscarney, I mean! It slipped out!"

He left the pigeons and turned to her eagerly.

"Please don't call me that! I should love it if you'd call me 'Terry'—everyone does!"

There was no mistaking his eagerness. She smiled, tracing a crack in the stone steps they were standing on with the tip of her lacy parasol.

"Very well, if you don't mind! It's so much shorter than the other. But honestly, I meant what I said just now!"

"Honest Injun, hand on heart?"

"Honest Injun, hand on heart! It has suddenly dawned on me that you're a fraud!"

"What a libel! And it's not logic either. Frauds and dears never go well together——!"

"They do sometimes! Now, Terry, admit that you're

not so passionately fond of old London, and poets' houses, and tombs in the Abbey as you pretend to be!"

The blue eyes tried to be serious, and failed.

"Well, to be strictly truthful (as I always am with you!) it's not one of my weaknesses!"

Deirdre threw out her hands in a sweeping gesture which embraced the old, grimy building behind her, the pigeons, their pattering feet coral-pink on the grey stone, the tall figure standing on the steps beside her.

"Well, why on earth didn't you say so?"

"Why on earth should I?"

"But my dear boy"—her voice sounded maternally severe—"you must have been bored to death!"

"What absolute rot! Anything that pleases you pleases me! You ought to know that by now."

Deirdre looked at him, and then very hastily away. She began to move down the steps, chirruping to the pigeons, and looked at him over her shoulder.

"Well, of course, you needn't come any more——"

"But I shall! Unless you fire me for good. I say, do be a——" He paused. Deirdre was looking past him with suddenly eager eyes and parted lips. "What's up?"

He turned, and saw a tall young man in grey crossing the road—slenderly built, dark-skinned, walking with a peculiar grace. Then he turned to Deirdre again, his eyes questioning. But Deirdre was gone——

The little scene that followed always lived with a strange vividness in Liscarney's memory. Deirdre was down the steps in a flash, scattering the pigeons, running, her swift, bronze-shod feet twinkling as if

winged, to catch up the man in grey. She dropped her parasol—it lay forlornly—half-opened, like a giant flower, in the gutter. Liscarney followed, picking it up on his way. Her quarry was now some way down the road, moving quickly among the crowd.

Not a few heads were turned after the girl in the orange dress, who ran like a boy, bumping into people, apologizing hastily, running again. Terence came up in time to see the end of the strange little scene. She caught up with the young man in grey as he was entering a shop. She laid a hand on his arm, breathlessly laughing.

The young man turned round, surprised. Terence saw a pleasant, dark-skinned boy's face, puzzled brown eyes, a wide, humorous mouth. Then he looked at Deirdre. All the laughter was gone from her face—she suddenly looked terribly tired.

"I beg your pardon," she said, smiling a little mechanically, "I thought you were—a friend of mine ——"

She turned to Terence, still smiling in that fixed way. The brown-eyed young man murmured a few conventional words, smiled rather nicely, raised his hat, and went into the shop. Terence and Deirdre stood looking at each other. Then Deirdre said again:

"I thought he was a friend of mine. I made quite sure—quite sure——"

Terence took one look at her face and then hailed a taxi.

"In you get!" he said—gave an address to the driver—got in himself.

They rumbled away through the busy traffic—away from the river, with its grimy barges, away from the coral-clawed pigeons, still pattering about in the sunshine, picking up odd grains of corn.

They spoke no word until they had left it all far behind them. Then Deirdre turned and smiled at him—her own, curling smile.

"I repeat—you *are* a dear, Terry! You're so—so understandy-y!"

Terence flushed uncomfortably—looking absurdly like a guilty schoolboy caught in the act.

"Oh, rot!"

The trite, slangy phrase had a most refreshing effect on Deirdre. She felt that he was all refreshing—his long-limbed business, sprawling on the seat beside her, the frank eyes that looked at her squarely, the wide, boyish mouth, with its little humorous wrinkles at the corners. All most delightfully refreshing. He was so gay, and hail-fellow-well-met, and clean run—and he never asked questions. She felt tremendously grateful to him—she wanted suddenly to explain.

"That boy was really awfully like—a great friend of mine. Not really, when you looked at him, but something in his build and walk. I made so sure of it that I was absolutely knocked flat when he turned round."

"I thought you looked a little tired," said Terence tactfully, "that's why I shot you into the taxi."

"I know—Terry, you take as much care of me as if I was marked 'Fragile—with care!' Why, I wonder?"

"Would you really like to know?" enquired Lord Liscarney eagerly.

Deirdre looked at him, and then very hastily out of the window.

"No thanks," she said politely but firmly. "Save it up for another time."

"Right-oh!" said Terence amiably, and leant back in his corner with the air of a man who is contented with all the world.

II

The day of the dance came round, to Deirdre's mingled trepidation and relief.

The trepidation was at the idea of making her début, stared at by curious eyes, criticized by sharp tongues. The relief was that the continuous whirl of dressmakers, dancing lessons, electricians, fittings, and all the fuss which even a small dance involves had come to an end.

Her dress lay in its tissue wrappings, waiting to be donned. She had no anxiety as to the skill of her slender feet in their silver slippers—they were indeed as "dance-y" as a fairy's. Downstairs the white and gold ballroom was waiting for the tap of little high heels on its polished floor, for the deep voice of the 'cellos, and the wailing of violins.

The night before the dance she had a curious dream. She dreamt that she was standing in the white and gold ballroom, the centre of a crowd of people. Such extraordinary people—little dwarfs and goblins, with twisted, wrinkled faces that leered and scowled at

her. They were pressing close in on her, threatening, muttering, when suddenly she saw Terence Liscarney's smooth fair head, towering over the crowd. He came to her, and, putting his arm round her, began to dance.

The orchestra struck up—what in the world were they playing? "Arline's Song" from "The Bohemian Girl"! What a funny thing to dance to! But it didn't seem to matter much in the dream. Then something made Deirdre look up. Standing in the doorway, his dark eyes fixed on her, was Guy. That orchestra—wailing—sobbing——

> "And I dreamt that one of the noble host
> Came forth my hand to claim—
> But I also dreamt, which charmed me most,
> That you loved me still the same—"

Deirdre heard her own voice cry, in the midst of a strange, unearthly silence—"Guy!——*Guy!*"

He threw back his head and laughed—she saw the old audacious tilt of his mouth. Then, still laughing, he came towards her. But the crowd surged in between, fiercely beating him back. She wanted to escape from Terence, but something held her back, powerless —— Escape—escape——!

Then she saw that he was winning—he was shaking off the fierce little men as a dog shakes water off his coat. Suddenly he held out his arms to her, and, by a supreme effort, she shook off the paralysing power that held her and ran to him. The ballroom was suddenly empty—the orchestra silent—there were only

themselves in the world, standing together in a great silence. And then she was alone—quite alone—by herself in the echoing ballroom. The lights flickered, and went out one by one. She called "Guy!" and then again—"Guy!"

But the ballroom was quite empty. . . .

Empty. . . .

Deirdre woke with the tears wet on her cheeks. She put out her hand and switched on the little reading lamp by her bed and saw with positive relief, instead of the gold and white ballroom of her dreams, the white furniture and fox-glove chintz of her familiar room.

But the dream haunted her all day. She was decidedly glad to see Terence's gay face when he came over that morning, looking very important and mysterious.

"I've got a little present for you," he announced. "An un-birthday present! Just to buck you up for this evening——!"

Deirdre almost danced.

"Terry, you think of everything! Doesn't he, Aunt Vi?"

Aunt Vi, who had wandered into the room like a large, aimless, disembodied spirit, assented affably and wandered out again—rather too casually.

Terry followed her, to return in a few minutes with a wicker hamper. This he put in her lap.

"There you are, madam! With compliments!"

Eager as a child, she drew back the bolt of the hamper. Sitting with his stumpy legs well apart, an

injured expression on his square, impudent face, that was irresistibly comic, was a Sealyham puppy.

Deirdre and he stared at each other for a second. Then the puppy slowly winked one black eye, and gave an approving "Wuff!" The next minute the hamper was on the floor, and the Sealyham was in Deirdre's arms, ecstatically licking her laughing face.

"Terry—oh Terry, you *dear!*"

"Do you like him?"

"Like him? I simply adore him! What's his name?"

"He had a yard long one in the pedigree, but you can name him yourself. Let's have a look at you, you young beggar!" He held the squirming puppy at arm's length, and reflected gravely. "What about Sam Weller! He's got a comic sort of face?"

"Beautiful! Samiwell, my precious, you are Samiwell. Terry, I've been feeling decidedly fed to-day, and you and Sam have cheered me up no end." She bent her head down to the excited puppy, squirming in Terence's arms. Luckily she did not see the expression in the blue eyes looking down at her. "How old is he, Terry?"

"Four months—fat little beggar, isn't he?"

He put Mr. Weller down, who immediately began to caper in giddy circles, making playful darts at Terry's legs.

"He must be so glad, poor darling, to get out of that old basket."

"Well, what about taking him for a toddle in the gardens? Let's go and baptize him in the Round Pond!"

Deirdre executed a *pas seul.*

"Good idea! Will you come too?"

"Rather! Buck up and get ready, and I'll wait for you."

Five minutes later a demure Deirdre (having informed Mrs. Strangways of her departure), in a pale green dress that matched her eyes, and a large white hat, joined Terence in the big, cool hall, and the trio set out for Kensington Gardens.

The sun was shining, the gay window-boxes all looked spick and span, and even the tall, austere mansions somehow looked jolly and friendly in the sunshine.

Not a few heads were turned after the trio as they strolled along. There was something young and arresting about them all—Deirdre with her vivid face, her laughing red mouth, Terence, big and fair and immaculate, and, padding along by their side, the little white dog with his impudent face, his lifted ear.

Kensington Gardens at last—and the fat balloon woman at the gate, with her flower-like bouquet of bubbles. Deep jade, twilight mauve, cloudy topaz-yellow, a warm rose-scarlet like the seeds of a pomegranate. Deirdre wanted to buy the lot, and send them soaring, vivid flower petals against the blue sky. Mr. Weller also approved of the balloons—he barked shrilly at them, and made a dab at the old woman's toes. Much against his will he was forced to leave the fascinating things behind, and seek "fresh woods and pastures new."

Kensington Gardens seemed the haunt of children

—such jolly mites, beginning with the babies who were wheeled up and down the Babies' Walk by starchy nurses, and ending with the long-legged bundles of muslin and frilly organdy, with round rosy faces under floppy hats, who skipped gravely along the Broad Walk, or played mysterious games of their own, sitting on the edge of the green benches.

They were dressed in all sorts of gay, brave colours —daffodil-yellow, currant-red, a jolly blue like a lupin.

"Look at the budding admiral over there!" said Terence suddenly.

He pointed to a sturdy little boy, resplendent in his white sailor suit, who was making, with a toy yacht under his arm, for the Round Pond. Evidently Sam, the Sealyham, shared his tastes, for with a "wuff!" of delight he was off, careering round the small sailor, uttering shrill barks of excitement.

Deirdre and Terence hurried up to administer chastisement and consolation, but the little boy, grinning widely, was trying to grab hold of Mr. Weller's fast-moving tail.

"Come here, Sam, you bad boy!" said Deirdre sternly. "He won't hurt you, darling."

"Oh, it's all right, f'anks," said the admiral loftily. "I'se used to dawgs."

Deirdre collapsed, and retreated from the arena, her place being taken by Terence.

"That's a fine yacht you have there, captain——"

The sailor surveyed this superior member of his own sex with an approving eye.

"It's called the 'Black Dea'f,' " he remarked cheerfully.

"The 'Black Death'? That's a good name. Where's she bound for?"

"Mexico—with a cargo of iron."

He displayed proudly a rusty nail in his hand. Just then his nurse, wheeling a small sister in a pram, came up and bore him off. With a glance of resignation, he said in his casual way:

"Good-bye—p'raps I'll see you again at the Pond—down at the docks, I mean—Good-bye, Dawg——"

They watched his sturdy little figure as it stumped Pondwards.

Then Deirdre said gravely:

"Oh King, live for ever! I agree—he *was* a darling! Didn't you love the way he said 'dawg'? He reminded me rather of Roly——"

"Ah—I've never seen Roly. He sounds to me no end of a lad. But Olivia was a jolly kid.'

She looked at him gratefully.

"Yes, she is—although her temper is dreadful! You've no idea how she and Howard fight—just like wild things! We've all got it—the temper, I mean."

"You too? Why, you're the sweetest thing I know!"

Deirdre made a face.

"That's very nice of you, Terry, but it's not true. I may be nice and smooth outside, but I'm all rough and prickly underneath the pretty rind!"

"I don't believe it!" said Terry flatly. "I don't believe you could do anything that wasn't straight and open and honest——"

"Terry, do be quiet—you're making my ears burn! Anyway, you'll know better one day."

Lord Liscarney opened his mouth, shut it again, and followed meekly in her wake. Sam Weller, now behaving with a comical staidness, padded along with waving stern and cocked ears. All the flower-beds were gay and orderly, standing like regiments of brilliant little soldiers waiting to be reviewed. There were tall, prim-faced hollyhocks, pyramids of sweet peas, purple and white candytuft, and the burnt orange and velvety crimson of straggling nasturtiums. Deirdre fell in love with the snapdragons that filled a large bed, palest yellow, flame-pink, brave scarlet with white throats—she liked the demure insolence of their little faces.

They sat down by the Round Pond—that halcyon sea into whose calm waters slipped the prow of so many childish argosies. The white sails of the larger yachts dipped and billowed like gulls' wings—the smaller craft kept cautiously close to the bank. They saw their friend the Admiral just launching his precious "Black Death"—by the absorbed expression on his round face they knew that his soul had slipped the narrow confines of Kensington Gardens, and was down among the clamour and noise and confusion of the Docks. For him there was no Round Pond, with its unruffled waters—the keel of his vessel was ploughing uncharted, perilous seas, bound with its precious cargo for Mexico——

Deirdre turned suddenly—indeed so suddenly that Mr. Weller, who was sitting between them, looking

up into their faces, with an expression of suspiciously angelic innocence, gave a yelp of surprise and protest.

"Terry, you've got the most delightful knack of making people happy! I was feeling rather wretched this morning, and along you came, and hey presto! all my gloom departed! How do you do it?"

"Oh, a gift of mine!" said Terence modestly, and with an absurd simper.

Deirdre laughed.

"Well, you deserve to be rewarded! Ask me for anything—except my new dance frock, and Samiwell! —yea, even unto the half of mine kingdom, and it shall be thine!"

Terence looked at her with sudden seriousness.

"Is that a pukkah promise?"

"It is, oh most estimable Terry!"

"I'll remind you of it one day," said Lord Liscarney gravely.

III

There are times when, from extreme happiness or grief, the world around us assumes a shadowy, unsubstantial air of unreality, as if we were walking in a dream.

To Deirdre the night of her dance seemed dream-like—she wanted to laugh at it all. It seemed so absurd that she—Deirdre Bellamy—should be dancing and laughing and chattering to her heart's content, and not lying brooding in the narrow little room at home.

When she dressed she stood staring at herself in the long glass. Her petal dress was of white tulle, artfully

artless; its simple severity accentuated her long slenderness. It was held up on her shoulders by fragile pearl straps—the silver lace underskirt shone through the petals of tulle when she danced, like the moon sailing through white clouds. The effect was startlingly beautiful. Deirdre looked unsubstantial—a divine witch, her green eyes veiled and inscrutable—a fairy child, cradled in flowers.

She picked up the beautiful single-feather fan with its ivory handle that Aunt Vi had given her—stood fanning herself dreamily, admiring her slender ankles, her narrow silver sandals, with their absurd heels. Suddenly she was aware for the first time of her own beauty—her own amazing power. It thrilled her a little—it burnt and tingled in her veins like a strange, intoxicating fire.

That was the first act of the dream-like evening.

The curtain rose on the second when she found herself going in on Terence Liscarney's arm to dinner. She looked at him with relief and delight.

"Oh, Terry, thank goodness it's you! I was so afraid that it was going to be a total stranger!"

Terence looked pleased.

"Yes, it's me all right." He suddenly wished that he was one of those clever chaps who can say something witty and brilliant on the spur of the moment. Something that would make her laugh in her own delicious way. He could only manage tritely: "You'll give me a dance or two to-night?"

"Oh, rather! Don't you feel dance-y? I do! How do you like me in this dress?"

Another chance to say something graceful and brilliant! If Gervase Wycome had been in his shoes!

He looked at her with his boyish eyes—she was startling in her loveliness.

"You look like a—a Fairy Princess!"

He felt rather than saw the tiny wince she gave. The shining eyes darkened for a second. . . . Another boyish voice, ringing in her ears—

"Like a Fairy Princess, you know——"

Then she laughed, as he had wanted her to do—her mouth curving.

"You base flatterer, Terry!"

She turned to her neighbour, still smiling. Terry sat with knitted brow—wondering. . . .

After dinner the guests began to arrive. Terence only caught glimpses of the slender white and silver figure—as she stood at the head of the big staircase, beside Aunt Vi, ponderous and seal-like in black lace, with rows of magnificent pearls round her fat neck.

The third act of this absurd dream-like comedy. She stood in a corner of the ballroom—besieged, entirely surrounded, by tall young men. You could not see her white gauziness for the black coats that clustered round her. She stood laughing, consoling, granting royally, her eyes shining, her lips parted.

"No doubt about her success," thought Mrs. Strangways complacently, as she watched her niece dismissing her court.

When Terence Liscarney at last managed to gain Deirdre's side, he said disconsolately:

"I suppose you're all booked up?"

She laughed at him over her fan.

"Well, I am——" His face fell ludicrously. "But I've saved two for you! You deserve something for your dearness to me!"

He wanted to take her in his arms and, before the eyes of the whole room, kiss the spot where the ghost of a tantalizing dimple hovered. Instead, he said unromantically:

"You're a sport! Which are they?"

"No. 1 and 16—I feel as if I could dance through Kensington Gardens to-night!"

The orchestra struck up—a haunting fox-trot which had achieved a well-deserved popularity. They took the floor with a remarkable smoothness. Liscarney was an extraordinarily good dancer, and it was seldom that he found anyone good enough to suit him. They had not been once round the room before he realized that Deirdre's skill was equal to, if not excelling, his own.

Dancing with her was not an accomplishment—it was a gift. Unconsciously she had known how to dance all her life—a very few lessons had put her *au fait* with modern dances. Terence was delighted. She was light as the wind in his arms, lissom as a spray of cherry blossom. Her little silver-shod feet seemed enchanted—she followed the most intricate steps that he introduced with astounding ease. People watched them admiringly as they dipped and swayed and whirled up the room. Not alone were they dancing perfectly, but they made a remarkably handsome pair—Terence, big and fair, Deirdre, slenderly tall in

her gauzy white and silver. Aunt Vi sitting chatting to the dowagers, watched them with a smooth smile which was almost a purr.

The night fled on swift feet for Deirdre. She passed from one partner to the other in a state of almost delirious happiness. She loved the lot of them—they were all young and clean-cut like Terry—with their beautifully brushed hair, their gay nonsense. They all looked at her with the frankest admiration in their eyes—looking at the soft shadow her lashes cast on the warm white smoothness of her cheek, the purplish lights in the black hair.

As she danced, she looked at the gay crowd round her. They were so friendly and smiling—she felt that she loved them all—the tall young men, the pretty girls in their gauzy dresses. They satisfied her old craving for colour and beauty—they were like a bed of flowers—a border of tulips—all blowing and dancing to the wind's pipes. There was a small dark girl like a leaping flame in her flower-like dress of scarlet tulle. Someone tall and fair wore topaz-yellow chiffons —she looked like a swaying daffodil as she danced. Dahlia Westcote was in black—shimmery, scaly black that went well with her violent red hair. She waved and smiled across the room at Deirdre—Deirdre felt that she loved her for it. The intoxication of all the colours—the lights—the music—went a little to Deirdre's head. She was unearthly in her loveliness —a slim, moonlit thing in her silver shot chiffons.

When she danced again with Terence Liscarney, she remembered her dream, and glanced smilingly at the

crowd round her—the happy, friendly crowd—so different from the muttering, threatening throng she had dreamt of. Although she smiled, she turned slightly in Liscarney's arms to see if the tall, slender figure was standing in the doorway, watching her with laughing audacious eyes. There was no one there.

"Who are you looking for?" asked Terry.

"No one!"

They smiled into each other's eyes.

"I say, I've discovered rather a decent little sitting-out place on the stairs—let's go and bag it, and have an orgy of ices!"

"Oh, Terry, you pig! All right—I'd love one!"

As they neared the door she slipped out of his arms like a tantalizing witch, adorably laughing.

Not a few pairs of eyes watched them disappear—Aunt Vi triumphantly, Dahlia Westcote musingly. She was dancing with Gervase Wycome at the time—they were great friends—a friendship cemented in the days when Dahlia wore her red hair in two long plaits, and Gervase drew sketchy caricatures for her edification on the schoolroom wall.

She said thoughtfully:

"She's lovely, isn't she?"

"Who—Miss Bellamy?"

"Um—I think all you men have gone absolutely crazy about her! I wonder how she does it?"

"There's no 'does' about it," said Gervase. "She looks at them, and they lose their heads. It's merely a gift—I think there's something rather uncanny about

that girl. I'll tell you who the chief victim is, though ——"

"Who?" asked Miss Westcote, knowing the answer before he said it.

"Poor old Terry——"

"Well, it doesn't take much brains to find that out! Anyone can see he's head over heels in love. I suppose she'll marry him——"

"If she's not a fool! Terry's no end of a catch in the matrimonial world! And yet——"

He paused, thinking of the expression he had seen that June afternoon in Deirdre's eyes.

"And yet what?" asked Dahlia, pinching his arm.

"Oh, nothing—only an idea. Still I should think she'd marry Terry if only to get away from that delightful mother of hers——"

Dahlia's dark eyes looked thoughtful.

"I wonder how they'll get on—also what Lady Liscarney will have to say!"

Gervase chuckled.

"It won't matter much, anyway! Terry's a headstrong fellow—obstinate as you make 'em—and what he means to have he gets. I rather fancy he'll be the winner this time!"

Dahlia shook her flaming head doubtfully.

IV

In August they went to stay with the Westcotes at their country house in Sussex.

But before they went Deirdre expressed a wish to go to Lords to see the Eton and Harrow match. So

to Lords they went, Aunt Vi bored and hot, Terence Liscarney to act as escort, Deirdre, all in white from top to toe. She loved it all—the Eton boys in their glossy top-hats their immaculate buttonholes—the pretty sisters and mothers, in their frilly organdies and flower-like parasols, hanging breathlessly on the lips of a small, important brother or son, who was giving his opinion on the merits of both sides. She loved luncheon—salmon mayonnaise, fruit salad—in a stuffy tent.

Howard was playing for Harrow—he was the youngest member of the Eleven. Deirdre felt absurdly proud of him. She followed the game closely—straining her eyes to watch the slim, white-clad figures out there in the glare of the sun.

Mr. and Mrs. Bellamy had come to watch Howard play. They all had lunch together—to Deirdre her mother and father seemed strangers. Yet they were just the same—Mr. Bellamy, grey-faced, grey-haired—her mother, dressed very beautifully in rose-pink embroidered voile, with the fluffiest of fluffy parasols, the smartest of smart hats.

She and Deirdre stood looking at each other. Deirdre was slightly the taller of the two—yet somehow she looked absurdly young in her floppy white hat, her frilly dress. Mrs. Bellamy looked at her with smiling eyes, then at Terence, then back again at her daughter. Deirdre could not tell why, but she felt her cheeks suddenly flame. She was glad when Aunt Vi, happily oblivious of the almost tense silence, broke it with a banal comment on the heat. She suddenly

felt more and more that her mother and father were strangers. She was glad to turn to Terry's tall form —Terry, the friend of two months' standing.

They all went into the tent to have lunch. Dahlia Westcote strolled up—her brother was playing for Eton—several of the men Deirdre had met at the dance or at other dances. They clustered round her, treating her like a young and spoilt queen. Mrs. Bellamy watched her laughing face bitterly—she talked to Terence, her hands fidgeting nervously with the tassel of her parasol.

They trooped out again to watch Harrow's innings. Dahlia and Terence were for Eton—they and Deirdre wrangled amiably. She felt that she loved Dahlia—there was something picturesque about her. She wore pale green organdy, and her flaming red hair looked startlingly vivid under the brim of a large black hat. Deirdre liked her pale, pointed little face, with its large dark eyes that always held a hint of laughter. She felt drawn to her—attracted in some odd, subtle way. They smiled at each other, recognizing the liking in each other's eyes.

Howard did exceedingly well, considering it was the first time he had ever played at Lords. He went up the steps of the pavilion, his handsome face flushed and glowing. Deirdre's heart swelled with pride for him—she waved her parasol like a flag.

Dahlia was saying to Terence:

"I suppose you went down to Eton last month?"

"To see the Winchester Match? Rather! I always do!"

Deirdre started.

"Were you at Winchester?"

"Yes—jolly fine old place! Have you ever been there?"

"No——"

She sat thinking. Of course it would be absurd to ask him if he knew anyone at Winchester called "Guy"! "Guy"—why, it was quite a common name. There must be dozens of "Guys" at a big school like Winchester. Besides, Guy would not have been there in Terence's time—or if he had been, he would be a small boy—quite beneath the notice of a magnificent being of nineteen. The quest was absurd.

Howard was to stay with them for the night—Mrs. Bellamy refused to do the same on the grounds that she was opening a fête the next day at Bamberly. Deirdre was glad when she went—she seemed the only discordant note in a beautiful day. She watched the rose-clad form out of sight, and, turning, met the sympathetic gaze of Dahlia Westcote's brown eyes. They looked at each other for a minute, then Dahlia took the other girl's hand.

"Good-bye," she said. "I am so glad you are coming on Friday—we are going to be tremendous friends—I feel it! Aren't we, Deirdre—can I call you 'Deirdre'?"

Deirdre almost stammered with pleasure.

"I—I should love *it!*"

"Well, you must call me 'Dahlia'—then we'll be comfy. Good-bye, Terry, old thing—give my love to Lady Liscarney——"

They watched her join her large, good-natured mother, looking like a fluttering leaf in her green frock.

"Isn't she a *dear?*" said Deirdre impulsively.

"One of the best," agreed Terence warmly. "She and I have been pals ever since the days when she made my nose bleed in a fight we had in the tool shed at Greyfriars! Wycome is desperately in love with her, but I'm afraid Papa Westcote is rather against the idea."

"What a shame!" said Deirdre hotly, who liked Gervase exceedingly, and thought that a brilliant career lay open before him.

They all went home in Liscarney's car—a large sleek Rolls, which reduced Howard to a state of incoherent ecstasy.

Deirdre was overjoyed at having her beloved Howard to herself again. The boy also was gladder than he cared to show at hearing her gay voice, and seeing the vivid face under the big hat.

Later on, when they were sitting in the soft twilight before dinner, he looked her over smilingly—the black hair dressed high with one jewelled flower stuck behind her ear, the vivid orange dress, spreading like a flower, the small brocaded sandals, held by fragile straps on her arched insteps.

"Well, so you've got what you said you'd get, old girl!"

"What did I say I'd get?"

"Oh, pretty clothes and all that rot!"

"All that rot indeed! Don't you like me in this?"

She looked at him with the prettiest, bridling vanity.

"Oh, rather—absolutely stunning!"

He hugged her awkwardly.

"How jolly you smell—sort of violety and nice——"

"That, my lad, is a Russian scent which Terry gave me——"

Howard said nothing, but cast her an impish glance. However, when she took a cigarette from a silver box on the table, and lit up with a casual air which was a little too good to be true, he could not contain himself, but burst out laughingly:

"And who taught you this little accomplishment?"

"Terry," said Deirdre, avoiding her brother's wicked eye.

"*Oh,* indeed!" Howard chuckled. "That young man seems to have fallen for you!"

"Oh, shut up!" said his sister elegantly, but, to her annoyance, pink-cheeked.

"Keep cool my che-ild, keep cool! I only want to ask—do you intend to become the Countess of Liscarney, Deirdre?"

Deirdre maintained a dignified silence, so her tormentor continued pensively:

"It wouldn't be a bad thing if you did, you know. After all, Terry's a rattling good chap, and jolly well off, too. I should take the plunge, old dear——"

"In another minute, Howard Rupert Bellamy," said Deirdre, "I shall turn you off this sofa into the weary world!"

Howard tried to look aggrieved.

"That's a nice way to treat your long lost brother.

I say, you don't think you're making smoke rings, do you?"

Deirdre stopped pursing her mouth into a comical "o," and said loftily:

"Be quiet, you horrid little boy! You notice that I kindly refrain from mentioning the orgy of Woodbines you had one day in the tool shed—with its disgusting results. Anyway, I *can* smoke a cigarette without being ill!"

Howard grinned, and opened his mouth to retaliate, but at that moment Aunt Vi came in, and the subject was forgotten, although he wrinkled his nose at her whenever Lord Liscarney's name was mentioned, and during the musical comedy which they went on to after dinner, trod on her toe when the sentimental parts came. Deirdre did not know whether to be vexed or amused.

Terence and Deirdre went to watch the second day of the Eton and Harrow match, when Mayne, the Eton captain, scored his century, and Archie Westcote also covered himself with glory.

On the way home in the car cricket formed the one subject of conversation.

"That Mayne is pretty hot stuff," commented Howard ruefully. "He'll captain the Lords Schools this year, I suppose."

"And Marshall, the Winchester captain, will probably captain the Rest side."

"He's good, isn't he?"

"Phenomenally so," said Terence. "He played beautiful cricket at Eton this year—hit the Eton

bowling all over the shop. It made me feel no end of a Methuselah, to be sitting there watching instead of playing. Why that young Marshall was a grubby little kid when I left. I remember he was Wycome's fag. Still," he added, "I thought he'd shape pretty well at cricket—that kid's got the prettiest style to watch of any fellow I know."

Deirdre listened idly.

"Who was your fag?" she enquired.

"A jolly little chap called Wyndham. Why, my hat, he's left now—how funny it seems!"

"But what was his name—his Christian name, I mean?"

Of course it was impossible—but still there was no harm in asking. Terry looked surprised.

"Oh Lord, I don't know—I believe it was George—either George or Geoffrey. But we used to call him Jingle. No, I'm certain it was George."

"Oh!" said Deirdre vaguely. . . .

Deirdre saw Howard off at the railway station rather wistfully.

"You'll come and see me when we're down at Spindlewood, won't you, Howard, dear?"

"You bet!" said her brother cheerfully. "Why, if the Pater *does* give me that Baby Triumph I took him over to see it will only be about twenty minutes' run——"

"Give my love to Olivia and Roly! Have you got that big box of chocs I gave you for them? . . . All right! . . . Good-bye——!"

Sitting in her corner of the big, silent Rolls, she was

suddenly forlornly aware that she was no nearer to finding Guy than she had been before. London was a big place—why, he might not even be in London! The forlornness of her quest struck her. Perhaps they would never meet again—but that was absurd! She *knew* that they would meet—some day. Deirdre wondered, a little smile in her eyes, if he was looking for her too, searching in crowds, scanning audiences. It never struck her that he might have forgotten her. She knew that while he lived he would never forget. Still, a little chill closed over her heart—she was so alone in her quest—terribly alone.

But there was Terry, sitting big and protecting in his corner—his blue eyes looking straight ahead. Not so alone after all.

She said suddenly:

"You'll be at Westcote's too, won't you, Terry?"

"You bet!" retorted Liscarney, grinning.

"I'm glad," said Deirdre Bellamy.

CHAPTER V

DEIRDRE AND TERENCE

I

SPINDLEWOOD GRANGE proved to be the most delightful place. Deirdre had never seen anything like it in her life. It was an old Elizabethan house, long and low, its creamy plaster crossed with most beautiful black oak beams. From the terrace that ran the length of the house there was a wonderful view—right over miles of weald and down and pasture.

Sitting there sometimes, Deirdre felt that she was on the edge of the world—for the garden below the terrace shelved sharply, thus giving one the impression of being poised in space. Deirdre enjoyed every moment of her month there. She loved Mrs. Westcote, her cushiony softness, her occasionally drooped aspirates, which she corrected and retrieved as anxiously as a good sheep-dog rounds up a straying member of his orderly flock. There was something pathetically anxious about her—anxious to please one, to appear at ease and in her right place, as Dahlia did, among all the "grand folk." Mrs. Strangways took a great liking to her—the two used to sit by the hour

on the terrace, playing Patience, and swopping fat-reducing recipes.

Mr. Westcote also Deirdre liked. He was a round, fat little man, like an animated suet dumpling, with a deplorable taste in fancy waistcoats, and a booming fat voice that matched his figure. He was a self-made man, and was fond of advertising the fact.

He had started with a small but flourishing grocery store in a suburb of London. The business had prospered and spread, until to-day when there was a Westcote's High-Class Grocery Stores in almost every town in the kingdom.

Deirdre did not need to be told that he was a grocer. She could picture him, a pencil behind one ear, a white apron shrouding his protruding contours, cutting bacon, taking orders, dressing the windows. Sometimes she wondered if he did not regret it all, and wish himself back in his own saw-dust sprinkled domain.

There were times, when he was carving one of his own hams in thin rose and white wafers, or pouring cream over his plate of Westcote's Flaky Crisps at breakfast, that she thought she detected a shadow of wistfulness in his pale eyes.

What Dahlia was doing aboard this galley was a mystery. She was an aristocrat from the top of her flaming head to her slender little feet. There was something delicate and finely cut about her, although she had the touch of level-headed shrewdness which no daughter of Samuel Westcote's could be without. Deirdre loved and admired her.

Dahlia had that seventh sense which knows so exactly what is right. She had furnished Spindlewood Grange herself, and the result was, instead of a medley of Louis Quinze chairs and Nottingham lace curtains and Victorian monstrosities all jumbled together, a restful and artistic interior. The rose and grey drawing-room, with its subtle, unexpected touches of deep Chinese blue was a work of art. All the bedrooms were cool and fresh, full of fine bits of glossy old oak, gay with crisp shiny chintzes. The only two rooms in the house which did not bear the hall mark of Dahlia's taste were those which Mrs. Westcote retained for her own. Here she gathered together all her household gods—heavily framed studies of woolly looking fruit and top-heavy flowers, large plush armchairs with wool antimacassars, and an expensive and hideous French clock—and retired there when the rose and grey drawing-room got too much for her, to contemplate blissfully the puce and crimson roses wilting on the ultramarine carpet, or to take a nap in the large text-hung bedroom, with its walls blazing with weird pink and yellow peonies.

Archie Westcote, home for the holidays from Eton, was a tall, good-looking youth who began to worship fervently at Deirdre's shrine. He had rather charming manners, and a delightful smile, but Deirdre glimpsed, under the polish which Eton had given him, a touch of vulgarity. He was not so innately well-bred as Dahlia. Deirdre sometimes puzzled over this. There was just the subtle difference between them that there is between two tables, the genuine and the faked.

The genuine is perfectly finished, as smooth and soft to the touch as satin. The faked table is to all appearances exactly the same, but the sensitive finger of an expert passing over it will detect a slight unfinished roughness in the wood. Thus, to Deirdre's fine intuition, Archie and Dahlia.

For the rest of the guests, there was Betty Van Sittart, the dark little American girl who had reminded Deirdre of a flame in her scarlet tulle dress—her brother, Elliot Van Sittart, a tall, sleek young man with lazy grey eyes that contrasted well with Betty's tireless vivacity—Lady Norma Mills, and Brian Adrian, a brilliant young composer who was rapidly coming to the fore. Sir Thomas and Lady Algate, old cronies of Mr. Westcote's, Lord Liscarney, and Gervase Wycome made up the party.

It was a very jolly party. They played and sang and danced a great deal—the tennis courts beyond the paddock were never empty—they bathed in the lake which Deirdre could see from her window, every morning, lying placid and shining among its fringing woods.

Deirdre was happy—immensely happy. She was charming to Mrs. Westcote—she went for long tramps with Mr. Westcote, who had taken a huge fancy to the "lass with the purty eyes." Then there was Dahlia—darling Dahlia, satisfying and amusing, with her funny little air of worldly wisdom. It would not have been quite the same without her slim white-frocked figure, oddly boyish with its mop of red curls.

The days seemed to blend into one pleasant, golden

blur. There was such a lot to be packed into them—bathing or golf in the morning, tennis for the energetic ones, and a hammock slung in the orchard for the drones—picnics or boating in the afternoon, and then the twilight dropping its silver and mauve net over the quiet garden, when they danced on the terrace to the strains of the big cabinet gramophone, or sat listening to the magic Brian Adrian's sensitive fingers wrought for them—Chopin, or Debussy, or the gentle laughter of Chaminade. Sometimes Deirdre would sing, but not often. She preferred to sit listening in the syringa-scented dusk, her thoughts wrapping her round like gentle wings.

She saw an immense lot of Terry. It seemed that the rest of the party, unobtrusively and tactfully, left them together. She did not even notice it, but thought with childish pleasure how nice of him it was to like playing cavalier to her. It was Terry who waited under her window in the blue and gold of the early morning until she stole down to him in the dew-wet garden, a big coat over her bathing dress. Then they would run over the fields, feeling the long grass and moon daisies brush wet banners against their bare legs, to where the lake waited, calm and lily-jewelled, to wrap them round with cool arms, as their swift flashing bodies clove the translucent golden water, like a sharp jewel-crusted dagger rending a piece of shimmering silk.

Perhaps Terence loved this hour best of all—he had her so completely to himself. There was not a soul about, except a moor hen or two, dark specks on the

glistening water, and Archibald the swan, who would sail out from his nest among the reeds and watch their diving with haughty aloofness.

What came later was just as exciting. It would be golf perhaps, the gentle art of which she was learning from Terence. She really did not care for it much, but it gave her the excuse for wearing a delightful white knitted golf suit, and the links were adorable. The course was laid out over miles of beautiful country-swelling shoulders of down, little woods and fascinating copses, patches of hether and yellow gorse, slopes of mauve-y pink scabious, glossy buttercups, and nodding moon daisies, which cost Terry many lost balls and much bad language.

However, it was really too hot for golf—much too hot. After having played a few holes, followed by the bored Mr. Weller (who was also a guest at the Grange), man and maid and dog would plunge into the depths of a cool wood and, sitting on soft moss, listen drowsily to the voice of the waterfall, thundering its splendid Te Deum, or lie among the bee-murmurous heather and harebells, where the ling spilt its passionate wine scarlet between the fronds of bracken, staring up at the hot, coppery blue of the August sky.

Sometimes they commandeered Dahlia's little two-seater and went for jaunts together—once over to Greyfriars to see Lady Liscarney, for whom Deirdre could not shake off that first curious feeling of dislike. Her fleeting glimpse of Greyfriars was delightful—she loved the old grey house, with its many windows, its crazy turrets, sunning itself so contentedly among

the spreading gardens, the mossy terraces, and acres of sun-dappled park. They had luncheon in the Octagonal Room, gay with its green curtains and painted ceiling—the dining-hall, a huge oak-panelled, tapestried place, being seldom used.

Lady Liscarney was charming to the girl—she showed her the picture gallery, the paved garden, and was extremely delightful. Still, although Deirdre told herself that it was absurd, the old suspicious dislike remained.

II

One day they went to Chanctonbury Ring. They tried to recruit other members for their expedition, but Dahlia, Gervase, and the Van Sittarts were playing tennis, Lady Norma and Brian Adrian had gone off in the canoe, and Archie Westcote was playing golf, so Deirdre, Terence, and Sam Weller set off by themselves.

Deirdre had never been up the Ring before, though she had often seen its tree-crowned summit humped against the sky. A curious thrill shot through her as she saw it—something told her that it was going to stage an important scene in her life. She said dreamily, hugging the little white dog's warm, sturdy body to her:

"Think of all the tragedies and comedies the Ring has seen, Terry! It looks wise, don't you think? Wise and brooding and very kind——"

Terence, occupied with his engines, which he did not think were running very well to-day, assented me-

chanically. She glanced sideways at him, and felt absurdly annoyed at his absorbed face. If it had been Guy—ah, Guy would have been ready to take her idea, and wrap warm glowing words round it, the gold-threaded brocades of romance, the delicate chiffons of imagination——

But it wasn't Guy—suddenly her eyes smiled and her irritation flew. It was dear, prosy, unimaginative old Terry, bound down to earth by his engines, and golf clubs and fishing rods. He could not join her in her Pegasus-like flights—only watch her as she rode among the stars.

She wondered mischievously if he had ever heard of Swinburne, and remembered the occasion when, in their London ramblings, he had quite innocently remarked that he believed there was one of George Eliot's landscapes in the drawing-room at Greyfriars! Darling old Terry! She would not have him changed for worlds. Just as Guy was placed aside in her thoughts, as a dreamer of dreams, with a brilliant, imaginative brain which was filled with as yet unwritten wonders, so Terence was placed as an out-of-door man, breathing of the heather and tang of the sea, solidly dependable, frankly unintellectual. They were seas apart, and yet she was glad.

They had turned off the main road, with its strings of cars, and were bumping up a narrow, cart-rutted lane, thickly overhung with beech and chestnuts. Some way up they left the car at a small cottage, and Liscarney carrying one end of their hamper, Deirdre the other, they started to climb the Ring.

It was a beautiful climb, through the heart of the beech woods which clothed one side of the hill, like a woman's hair spread over a willow. The sunlight only flickered goldenly through the thick boughs overhead, hung with their ripening brown burrs. To either side of them spread deep gullies and ravines, natural amphitheatres which staged only the midsummer—even revels of the Wee Folks, who, as everyone knows, hold the Ring as their own. Wherever they looked, cathedral-like arches of green boughs opened out—the fresh, crinkly jade of the leaves already lightly brushed with autumn's hennaed finger-tips.

"Don't let's go any further!" wheedled Terence, resting the hamper on the guarded roots of a huge beech tree. "Let's have lunch here!"

Deirdre's eyes laughed at him from the shade of her wide hat, Deirdre's vivid mouth mocked.

"Terence Liscarney, you are the *laziest* boy! Come on—it will be worth it when we get to the top!"

So on they went, until Deirdre felt the sharp, thyme-breathed wind in her face and they left the mossy woods behind, to thread the crisp, springy grass of the downs.

On the brow of the slope a flock of sheep were cropping the sweet turf, while an agitated, bob-tailed sheep-dog, a mere bundle of wool on four legs, rounded up the last vacant-faced member of his straggling flock. The Sealyham struggled frantically in her arms. The shepherd, a picturesque figure, stood leaning on his crook, encouraging the dog with curt, gruff commands. At last the flock was herded together, and they began

to move in a long column towards the beech-wood path. The man, as he passed Deirdre and Terence, gave them a gruff "Good day" with a flash of fine white teeth in his brown face. They stood watching the orderly cavalcade patter down the path—it was a picture Deirdre never forgot. Between the smooth tree trunks they saw the little white sheep going softly—softly—over the thick moss, and then at the end of the flock the shepherd, with his old torn smock, the woolly sheep-dog, walking sedately now, like a prim schoolmistress out for a walk with her giggling crocodile of girls.

It reminded Deirdre of a picture by Whistler. She drew a long, ecstatic breath.

"Wasn't that lovely, Terry? I've come to the conclusion that there are no end of glorious places in England that I must see before I go to my Venetian lagoons, and desert oases, and Spanish palaces! There, Samiwell darling, you can go down now, but you mustn't go far from us."

She looked very young in the short white skirt, the white silk jumper.

She began to dance a little, skipping over the springy turf. Her eyes shone like sunlit water, green and clear between the black, silky fringe of her lashes.

"I'm fey!" she said. "Absolutely fey! There's something about the Ring which makes me feel queer! Do you know that I belong to the Wee Folk, Terry? You see, my birthday's on midsummer eve!"

He looked at her lovely, vivid face.

"I believe you're a witch, Deirdre!"

"I shouldn't be surprised! Not the black cat sort,

who fly about on broomsticks, but someone like Kundry in "Parsifal"—waiting like a snake among the flowers. Or Circe—I always rather liked Circe! Or, 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci,' with her 'wild, wild eyes.' Hurry up, Terry, or you'll find yourself 'alone and palely loitering!' Come along, I'm dying for a bun!"

They were close to the Ring now, with its closely packed rosette of trees. Suddenly Deirdre paused and pointed with one slim brown finger.

"*Look!*" she said breathlessly.

Below them lay what looked like a parti-colored map—golden fields of corn, silver of oats, splashed with the poppies' ardent flame, rugged brown of ploughed fields, jade of pastures, bare shoulders of down, little hamlets dotted like toy villages here and there. It was a clear day and they could see for miles. Nowhere the blue mistiness of the forest showed dark against the sky. The wind, faintly tanged with the clean sting of the sea, the unobtrusive scent of crushed thyme, blew in their faces, whipping Deirdre's cheeks to a faint, cold rose. She tore off her hat and let the wind have its will with her heavy hair. She loved to feel it blowing through her, surging round her, like a passionate lover sweeping her into his arms.

She suddenly laughed, a high, bewitched, shake of laughter.

"Oh, the beautifulness of everything, Terry!" she said. "That wind has blown everything ugly and old and tired in the world away!"

Terry put down the basket.

"Now, where's a good place to grub in?" he asked looking round him.

Deirdre laughed, and came down from the clouds with a bump. The dearness of Terry! The solid, refreshing prosaicness of him! When she soared too high among the stars he put out his strong arms and plucked her down again.

"If that had been Guy now," she thought, smilingly, "we would have sat shivering on the hamper, looking at the view and quoting Swinburne, until it was time to go home!"

She curbed her impatient Pegasus, and bent her thoughts to the task of finding a sheltered spot for their picnic.

They fixed on a large beech tree on the edge of the Ring, beneath whose sweeping branches they could sit and look at the view beneath them. Deirdre unpacking cold chicken, and crisp rolls, and big, knobbly strawberries reposing fragrantly among their cool green leaves, realized suddenly that she was extremely hungry. They had a royal picnic. The girl was, as she said, in a "fey" mood. She laughed and joked and mimicked, her eyes gaily sparkling at Terence over the rim of her iced-fruit-soda-filled glass. Terence thought that she looked about fourteen.

"Isn't this perfect, Terry?" she said once. "It's like the Garden of Eden! You're Adam—have another sandwich, Adam?—and I'm Eve, and Sam is the Serpent! Aren't you, Samiwell, my precious?"

Mr. Weller at that moment did not look like a serpent. He was reminiscent of a dove. He sat, bright

brown eyes looking innocently at his mistress, anticipating favours to come. Deirdre gave him a piece of chicken, and continued pensively:

"Chanctonbury Ring gives me the queerest, excitingest feeling. As if I want something awfully badly, but I can't get it! Do you feel that too, Terry?"

Liscarney stirred his long limbs lazily.

"No—at least not now—I do sometimes."

Deirdre surveyed a scarlet berry through the half-shut eyes.

"Really? When do you?"

Terry suddenly leant forward, his blue eyes leaping with that curious Something which Deirdre had dimly seen in the garden at Green Gables.

"When I look at you," he said, in a low, strangely intense voice.

Deirdre looked away hastily, for once at a loss for anything to say. She suddenly did not want any more strawberries—she wanted to be up and away—away from the glance of those boyish eyes—walking with the sharp strong wind in her face. With a lavish hand she piled up her plate with tempting scraps for Mr. Weller's consumption. Then she got up, shaking the crumbs from her lap.

"Let's explore a bit!" she proposed, embarrassment making her voice sound more than usually boyish. "We can leave the things here—they'll be perfectly all right. I want to look for Roman arrow heads!"

He got up at once, stretching himself like a lazy, splendid young animal.

Deirdre reflected as she walked away that she would

like it better if he were not so easy-going and obedient —if he had argued a little—pitted his will against her own. Yet that was not Terry's way. He was like an affectionate, well-trained dog, obeying her slightest word. Instantly she reproached herself for the thought. Why, it was part of his charm—that easy falling in with others' wishes! Why was it that today she was constantly finding fault with him in her heart?

"I'm a little beast," thought Deirdre remorsefully. "He's such a dear, too—" And she turned to him with her best and sweetest smile.

For some time they rambled over the Ring, poking among the earth and moss with no success. Mr. Weller, thinking a rabbit hunt was in process, joined in with great excitement and much noise.

After a bit, tiring of the search, they left the circle of trees behind, and sat down on a steep slope which went down into the heart of the beech woods again.

Here it was all carpeted with moss—so thick and soft that one's feet sank into it. Deirdre buried her face in its velvety softness—a faint, clean scent stole gently up to her nostrils—the fragrance of crushed thyme. She said softly:

"Look at that, Terry—a fairy forest!"

The green moss was certainly a fit forest for the Wee Folk to dance in. It looked for all the world like groves of exquisite miniature pines and elms—one could imagine Titania sleeping on her thyme-sweet couch in the shade of their delicate boughs.

Terence nodded without speaking. He seemed to

be watching, not so much the elfin forest as the face bent above it. Suddenly he said:

"Deirdre!"

The green eyes were all at once veiled and guarded, as if they were warily watching beneath their white lids.

"What is it, Terry?"

It did not seem as if it was herself speaking. She felt as if she was watching two people play a scene on the stage. She heard Terence say "I love you"—and felt a faint pang of surprise.

Terence's voice went on—how funny he looked! Not at all the happy-go-lucky Terry, with his gay eyes—a stranger——

"The first day I saw you I loved you——"

It was proceeding along the usual lines.

"We should be very happy—we could travel a lot —Deirdre——"

Deirdre—why, that was her name! She heard the voice—Terence's voice—say again, very gently—"Deirdre!"

Then the stupor cleared from her brain. She suddenly realized that Terence was speaking to *her*—asking her to marry him.

She looked at him steadily for a moment, and then away, down into the valley beneath them.

In the garden of the cottage below someone was making a bonfire. She could see the faint lilac-tinted smoke rising in misty spirals and eddies on the still air, and every now and then a pale tongue of flame that leapt up like a swift sword.

Then she said gently:

"Terry—dear, dear Terry—I can't marry you——"

Well, it was out now—she could not look at the sudden quenching of the flame in those eager eyes.

"Why not, Deirdre? I'd make you happy—I swear I'd make you happy——"

"I know, dear—it's not that——"

"Is there—someone else?"

She thought of a boy's dark face, thin and eager. If only they had not been parted like that she would have been able to say "Yes." But now—after a short week of happiness? The whole thing was absurd. One day, though—when they found each other—— Something sang in her heart like a bird.

"No, Terry," said Deirdre quietly. She rested her chin on her hands and looked at him with her oddly childish eyes. "I wish you didn't love me, Terry. We were so happy before, weren't we?"

He said eagerly:

"It was just because of that, that I had hoped you cared for me. We seemed to get on so well together ——"

"I *do* care for you—a tremendous lot! But not in the way you want. Terry, I'm sorry——"

He swiftly, gaily rallied.

"Don't sound so dejected, you dear kid! It's not *your* fault that I love you. But I always have done, ever since I saw you with your long black plait, and your pink cotton dress, standing out in the sunshine. It's just—infernal luck——"

A little silence fell between them, a heavy little si-

lence. The little white dog climbed into Deirdre's lap and settled down with a contented sigh. She laid her cheek against his velvety ears.

At last she said hesitatingly:

"You don't think I've behaved very badly to you, do you, Terry? That I—I've encouraged you? Some people might, you know——"

Liscarney gave a short laugh.

"I'd like to see them!"

"Terry, you don't know how mean I feel! How utterly beastly!"

The young mouth was quivering. Terence was suddenly extraordinarily gentle.

"Darling, don't be absurd! You're not to blame in the least little bit, and if you worry about it I shall be awfully cross with you."

All at once she saw him invested with a certain dignity—a gay courage that masked his own feelings and thought for hers. Tears came to her eyes—she thought childishly:

"What a dear he is! If it hadn't been for the Fate that sent me into Gilly's Wood that morning——"

She rose to her feet.

"Shall we get the hamper and go, Terry? I—I'm rather tired."

So they went—through the beech woods to where the little yellow two-seater awaited them. All the way home they were silent—Terence occupied with his own thoughts, Deirdre weighed down with a heavy sense of her own selfishness. All love was cruel, she reflected sadly—one or the other, the love or the loved

one, had to be hurt. It was just the way of things

As for Mr. Weller, he slumbered heavily, surfeited with chicken and excitement, his square, impertinent head resting on a fold of the beloved's skirt.

The little car hurtled onwards through the sunshine.

III

Some days after they went back to London.

Terence came to see them off, and his last words to Deirdre were, as he stood looking down at her:

"If you ever want me—if you change your mind—you'll send for me, won't you?"

Deirdre nodded, her eyes very soft and shining.

"Of course, Terry dear. Are you going to stop at Greyfriars long?"

"Some time—but I'll see you soon, I hope——"

"Yes, do come. Good-bye, then——"

They spoke thus, not knowing that twenty-four hours after they would meet again.

Aunt Vi and Deirdre and Sam had the carriage to themselves.

Afterwards the girl remembered vividly exactly how Mrs. Strangways had looked that morning. She wore a wonderful hat with a green wing in it—and her monocle swung by a narrow black ribbon among the laces on her massive chest. She looked very well and excessively cheerful, having procured two brand new fat-reducing methods from Mrs. Westcote. Around her were enough magazines and journals to

stock her for a journey to Honolulu. They filled her lap and swamped the seat: *Punch, The Strand,* and a highly coloured periodical, depicting on its orange cover a lady in a carmine bathing costume, had overflowed and lay upon the floor.

"Aunt Vi darling," said Deirdre suddenly.

Mrs. Strangways put down "Nash's" reluctantly.

"Yes, dearie? Such a good story by Hall Caine in this—quite exciting. You know I don't usually like his queer people—so unpleasant generally. And the way they talk! Manx, I suppose it is. What were you saying, childie?"

Deirdre began rather hesitatingly:

"Aunt Vi—when you've had enough of me—you must pack me home again, you know——"

"What is the child talking about?" Aunt Vi asked the River Girl on the cover of "Nash's." "Had *enough* of you?"

"Well, I've been with you over two months, Auntie Vi. You've been an angel to me—a darling—but I must be an awful bother. So if you're fed up——"

The green feather waggled indignantly.

"Fed up! Why bless you, I'm having the time of my life! You don't know how I love giving you a good time! No, you're not going back again, my dear! I tell you that Cynthia would do her utmost to put you in the background again—I could see how jealous she was at Lords. You may have thought I was half asleep at the time, but I wasn't! I was watching her, and you too, bless you, darling—enjoying yourself as you ought to do!"

Deirdre got up and hugged her, to the great bouleversement of the green feather.

"Aunt Vi—you—utter—*darling!*"

Mrs. Strangways waved her away, well pleased nevertheless, and straightened her hat.

"So don't you worry, dearie—I'm not going to let you go! You're coming with me to Nice for the winter, and you're going to stay with me until you're married happily, and off my hands." She shot a glance at her niece, which reminded Deirdre comically of a parrot cocking a crafty eye at the pretty finger put between the bars of his cage. "If I could see you married to Liscarney it would make me very happy."

Deirdre sighed—it seemed as if she was withholding happiness from so many people—Terry—Aunt Vi——

"He asked me, Auntie Vi——"

Mrs. Strangways started violently, and "Nash's" slid off her lap to the floor, where Mr. Weller proceeded to sample its contents.

"And you—*Deirdre*—you *refused* him?"

Deirdre nodded, feeling extremely guilty.

"But, my dear child—the chance of a lifetime—the best-looking and richest young peer in England—the catch who so many have angled for in vain!" Aunt Vi was a little breathless—her disjointed remarks each came out with a little gasp and a small "plop!" "But why on earth——?"

Deirdre wanted to laugh at her aunt's agitated face, but she managed to control her feelings.

"I don't love him, Aunt Vi——"

"What an absurd reason! No one thinks of that nowadays! Besides, I am sure you would grow very fond of him in time. It is evident that he worships you—he would give you everything you could possibly want——"

Deirdre felt suddenly impatient.

"But that's not everything, Auntie!"

Mrs. Strangways heaved a large sigh.

"Well, you are a foolish child. I wish you'd think it over, anyway, before you quite make up your mind ——"

"It's no use, I'm afraid——"

Aunt Vi looked at the lovely young face kindly.

"Well, darling, don't worry yourself about it. Anyway, I mean to make you absolutely independent."

"What do you mean, Auntie Vi?"

"I'm going to leave everything to you, darling—I've been thinking of it for some time——"

"Everything—to—*me!*"

"Yes—then you'll be independent of anyone. I am going to see the lawyers about it to-morrow—by my previous will everything goes to Charity——"

"But—Auntie dear—surely you have a nearer relation than me?"

"There is no one—Fillimore has no relations living. Of course I meant to leave all you children a certain sum—but now it is all to go to you. You're as dear to me as my own child, darling."

Just for a moment Deirdre sat still—visions floating rapidly through her brain—travel—beauty—Venice, Egypt, Granada. Money meant all that. Money was

Power. She could find Guy with its help. Money meant to her escape—once and for all, escape. . . .

She sat with her eyes dreaming. Then she was holding Mrs. Strangways close in warm young arms.

"Aunt Vi, if you knew—if you knew what it meant to me! It—it's like a Royal Pardon—a reprieve from prison! I don't know why you should do it——"

"Because I love you, childie—isn't that enough?" Aunt Vi became suddenly business-like. "Now, do stop strangling me, and sit down. I ought to be very cross with you—interrupting me in the most exciting part—just when he found out—— Now, where did I put that magazine? I'm sure I—Sam, you villain! Give it to me! Good dog! Oh dear, he's torn it—never mind, only the cover—let me see, where did I get to? 'He turned round, and saw her standing in the doorway, with——' No, that's not the place—ah, here we are!"

Aunt Vi settled down again with a grunt of content, leaving Deirdre to her dreams—her glorious dreams

——

The train ran into Victoria Station.

Deirdre thought of the first time she had seen it—how absurdly long ago that seemed! That slim girl in her badly fitting coat and skirt, her hard straw sailor, was like a figure in a dream.

The sleek grey Daimler was waiting—she loved it now, because it seemed home-like. The chauffeur, a sleek, grey little man to match the car, beamed at her as he held open the door—he admired Deirdre immensely, considering her far, far prettier than Gladys

Cooper, whom he had hitherto worshipped from afar as the perfection of feminine beauty.

It all seemed home-like to Deirdre—London smiled at her, opening welcoming arms. The houses along the Park looked so friendly in the sunshine—the people passing by all seemed jolly and good-tempered—even the lumbering 'buses looked gay with their flaring advertisements of revues and newspapers and cigarettes.

As for 64 Clement Street, never had its white paint and green sunblinds looked so fresh and immaculate—the window-boxes were full of lobelia, deep blue rosettes of flowers.

"Isn't it lovely to be home!" said Deirdre ecstatically.

Aunt Vi agreed.

"I feel tired," she said. "The journey, I suppose."

Deirdre looked at her—the jolly face certainly seemed a little drawn, and was it her imagination, or was there a pinched, blue look about the mouth?

"You must have a rest, darling," she said anxiously. "I'll come and tuck you up in your room."

They went into the big cool entrance hall—Lark, the butler (a ponderous, heavy-looking individual, who certainly did not fit in with his name) hovering, torn between fear of Mr. Weller, who liked making darts at his legs, and respectful pleasure at their arrival, in the background.

"Are you going up now, Auntie?"

"I think so—extraordinary how tired I feel."

Mrs. Strangways started to mount the wide oak

staircase, leaning rather heavily on the carved balustrade. Suddenly she stopped short, with a sharp cry of pain, swayed, made a horrible clutching gesture at the air, and before either Lark or Deirdre could reach her, fell like a log, rolling in a sickening, bumpy way to the bottom of the stairs. There she lay very still—horribly still—all twisted—a mere bundle of inanimate clothes.

Deirdre found her voice first.

"'Phone for the doctor," she said. "Quick—the nearest! Send the car to fetch him! *Hurry!*"

Then she went down on her knees by the still, twisted heap that was Aunt Vi.

Servants came running—the grim Parker, suddenly grim no longer, but ashen-faced. They carried Aunt Vi up to her bedroom—took off the crumpled hat with its absurd green feather. Deirdre chafed the cold hands—a sick dread catching at her heart.

It seemed ages—years—until the doctor came.

He was a tall, thin man, with a face like an undertaker's and kind eyes. Deirdre noticed that he had a very badly fitting set of false teeth. One was missing near the front, which somehow jarred on her. She found herself not listening to what he said, but watching that irritating gap all the time.

"A heart attack," he said briefly, giving some curt instructions to Parker.

She scuttled away like a frightened blackbeetle.

Deirdre still looked at that gap—she found herself wondering with absurd annoyance why he did not have another tooth put in. It turned his kind smile

into a leer—a horrible, grotesque leer. Now that she looked at it the wardrobe had a leer too—it was leaning tipsily towards her—grinning all over its evil face.

"She's coming to," said the doctor.

Deirdre wondered who was "coming to." She sat down suddenly, as if her legs had folded up like a concertina. That wardrobe—she thought fretfully that if someone didn't take care it would be over on top of them. Again her mind wandered in vague backwaters—she fell to speculating on the cause of that missing tooth. A hard chocolate perhaps—she remembered that Aunt Vi had——

The doctor was speaking to her.

"She wants you, my dear—just for a moment——"

Deirdre thought that his eyes looked pityingly at her.

She found herself kneeling by the big bed, looking at the oddly pinched grey face on the pillows. The heavy lids flickered—Aunt Vi's pale eyes stared up into her face. Recognition flickered in them—she half raised herself.

"Deirdre——" gasped the weak voice—"Terence—and you—promise—me—*Deirdre*——"

Then there was a choking sound, and she fell back on the bed again.

Deirdre got up, and looked at Parker over the bed. Parker was crying—convulsively, with odd little gasps and moans. She wanted to ask her what was the matter, but she couldn't.

The wardrobe was leering horribly at her—pressing its face into hers, swaying tipsily. She wanted to cry

out, but no sound came. Then the wardrobe fell with a crash. . . .

Blackness . . . a great roaring in her ears. . . .

IV

Deirdre woke up the next morning to the sunshine streaming in on to the white paint and foxglove chintz of her own room. She lay thinking, a great languor and weariness stealing over her.

Something had happened—something dreadful. She could not quite remember it. Between her and the events of the day before had come a dreadful period of darkness, semi-consciousness which seemed to be filled with leering faces and slimy, oozy things that stared at her with expressionless, dead eyes. She looked thankfully at the sunshine, and the bowl of asters, pink and mauve on the table by her bed. If there was still sunshine and flowers in the world, nothing very dreadful could have happened. Then the door opened and her mother came in. After the first shock of surprise Deirdre was conscious of displeasure. She wished that Mrs. Bellamy would go away and leave her alone with her flowers and her sunshine.

But her mother came over and sat beside her.

"Do you feel better now?" she asked.

"Better? What do you mean? I'm all right."

Mrs. Bellamy fidgeted nervously with the girdle of her filmy black dress.

"You gave us all a scare yesterday," she said.

Suddenly Deirdre remembered everything—Aunt Vi's grey face, the falling wardrobe.

So that was what had happened. Aunt Vi was dead —jolly Aunt Vi, with her absurd parasols, her totally unnecessary monocle. She would never see the sunlight again, or friendly faces, never hear music, or feel the clasp of warm hands. All that was ended. . . .

Deirdre did not cry. She lay staring at the picture on the wall opposite. It was a water-colour—a piece of the moor lying all rose and brown with heather beneath a heavy, lowering sky. At last she said, still looking at it:

"I want to get up."

"Do you think you feel well enough?"

"Oh, I'm all right"—she spoke brusquely—"I'm going to get up now."

"Very well—I'll send Parker to you."

Mrs. Bellamy left the room, for which Deirdre was devoutly thankful. She threw back the clothes and got out of bed. She felt absurdly shaky and dizzily sick. After a minute this passed off, although the shakiness remained.

After a hot bath, smelling of violets, she felt better. She had a cold shower after it, loving the tingling sensation of the cool water on her skin.

Parker helped her to dress—a changed Parker, with red-rimmed eyes. In making her selection of the day's dress it struck Deirdre that of course she ought to wear black. But Aunt Vi had hated her in black—she would not want her to wear it. She chose a pearl grey silk stockinette dress, with stockings and beautifully cut suède shoes to match. Then, holding very carefully to the banisters, she went downstairs.

The house was very still—dreadfully still. Mr. Weller greeted her with effusion, but even his vivacity seemed suppressed. Together they entered the drawing-room, where her mother and father were sitting. She sat down thankfully in one of the big rose brocade armchairs, keeping the Sealyham in her arms.

"When did you arrive?" she asked her mother politely.

"Yesterday evening—Lark wired for us to come." She added with a certain relish, "Poor darling Violet. It was very sudden—heart failure."

Deirdre thought—"You smug beast—you don't care a bit in your heart of hearts——!"

Aloud she said:

"Anyway, I am glad that she did not have any pain ——"

A little silence fell. Mr. Bellamy had retired, and left them together. Deirdre looked round the beautiful room, and somehow was surprised to find it unchanged. Her mother was speaking; with an effort she listened.

"Well, I suppose that you will have to come home again now."

"I suppose so," said Deirdre, pulling Sam's ears.

She realized that secretly Mrs. Bellamy was pleased not at having her back again, but that she was not going to be admired and spoilt and given her rightful share of Love and Life any more.

Satisfaction was at the back of those handsome eyes.

"Really it was just as well," she was saying. "I was going to write and ask for you back again. Olivia

is too much of a handful for me alone, now that Roly is going to school."

"Why don't you send her to school too?" asked Deirdre hotly. "Why shouldn't she have as many advantages as Roly?"

"My dear, you wouldn't ask that if you knew the losses your father's firm is suffering. Of course, enjoying yourself here, you never would think——"

Deirdre's eyes swept her contemptuously.

"No, I wouldn't," she said curtly. "And I believe all that's rot. It doesn't seem to have affected you much, anyway."

Mrs. Bellamy's narrow lips twitched furiously, but she managed to control herself with an effort.

"Well, that's arranged then," she said silkily. "After the funeral you will come home again with us."

Deirdre said nothing—she looked at her mother through narrowed eyes. They stared at each other, frankly hostile, frankly measuring each other's power. And into Deirdre's heart had come a dreadful desolation—a knowledge that she was trapped again. Unless a miracle happened, she was shut in from all the beauty of life that she had thought was hers. After one intoxicating, heady sip from the Cup of Life she had had it dashed from her lips. There were no means of escape this time—a panic seized her. She said a little prayer as she sat there—a wild little prayer:

"God, don't let her take me back again! Help me to escape from Her for ever! Aunt Vi, help me to escape!"

As if in answer to her prayer, the door opened, and

Lark came in, carrying a large white box. He looked at Deirdre with sympathy and a certain paternal importance.

"With 'is Lordship's compliments," he said, putting the box into her lap.

Terence! Deirdre put the injured Sealyham down and opened it hastily. Inside was a sheaf of long-stemmed crimson roses, with the dew still wet on their velvety petals—a cluster of heliotrope, intoxicatingly fragrant. There was a card inside—she scanned it hastily.

"I am coming to-day, if I may.
TERRY."

With the flowers in her arms, brushing her pale cheek with their scented heads, she looked at her mother. Sudden triumph flamed in her eyes. There was a way out then! Why had she not thought of it before? A memory of Aunt Vi's weak voice came to her—"Terence—and you—promise—me—Deirdre."

And then another memory, even more poignant. A young voice, a little thrilled and shaken—

"I'd known you were somewhere, waiting for me all my life . . . I—I'd always known——"

Mrs. Bellamy saw her shrink in her chair as if from the sting of a lash. Her face was strained.

She was at the cross-roads of her life——

One road led to the wider way—to Life and all the beauty of it—to the things she had dreamt of in the narrow bed at home—Venice, Granada, Tunis, Luxor.

It meant Escape—once and for all. Escape! . . . She could take that road by marrying Terence Liscarney, and giving up for ever her dreams of what might have been.

The other road led back to prison again. She would have to stay there till the Prince killed his dragon, and delivered her from it for ever. But it would be weary waiting for him. And he might never come.

Again panic seized her in its bony grasp.

He would never come. He would forget her. Secure in his warm, friendly world, just entering into his glorious heritage of youth and success, how could he remember what must have been only a passing phrase in his life—those idyllic days in Gilly's Wood? A terrible thought struck her. Perhaps he had been playing with her all the time—perhaps his gay friendship, his sympathy, his ardent championship of her wrongs had all been a pretence, devised to idle away a careless hour or so. Perhaps he had been laughing at her secretly—even—oh dreadful thought!—that he had kept away purposely from the wood!

Mrs. Bellamy, watching, saw a sudden flush stain Deirdre's cheeks, then fade, leaving them deadly white. . . .

Yet it *could* not be so! Deirdre knew that truth had looked at her out of the lad's laughing eyes—she felt shame that her trust in him had ever wavered. Yet—back came those panic-stricken thoughts hovering round her like a flock of evil vultures. She stood there, watching the shattering of her childish idyll with tragic eyes. Suddenly she felt very tired. . . .

Lark reappeared like a discreet genie.

"Luncheon is served, madam," he announced in the hushed voice of a high priest.

Luncheon—the yellow Chinese dining-room—sunlight on the silver and glass. Deirdre made a pretence of eating, but she drank a glass of sherry, which steadied her nerves and pulled her together. None of them spoke much during the meal. Mr. Bellamy nervously made a few trite remarks and then relapsed into an uncomfortable silence. Mrs. Bellamy fidgeted irritably with the girdle of her gown, or the delicate stem of her glass. Deirdre sat thinking, her brain suddenly clear and keen.

After lunch her mother complained of a headache and went upstairs to lie down. Mr. Bellamy, palpably relieved, went for a walk. Deirdre was left all alone in the big, rose-pink drawing-room. She sat down on the sofa, in a nest of gold and black cushions. Mr. Weller, whining a little, clambered up beside her, and looked into her face with bright, anxious eyes. Deirdre cuddled him close to her—the feel of his warm, rough little body was comforting.

She had made up her mind. Quite calmly and sanely she had thought it out while making a pretence of eating her cutlets at lunch. She would marry Terry. She would forget Guy completely—drive him out of her mind, and fill in the gap he left with happiness, and beauty, and Terence. She would make Terence very happy, and in time, perhaps, grow to love him in the right way. He, at any rate, should never have cause to regret their bargain. And Aunt

Vi, if she could see and hear her niece, would be happy.

Aunt Vi—the desolate feeling came back again. Aunt Vi was dead—who had loved her, and thought for her happiness.

Loneliness wrapped her round in its drab mantle.

Mr. Weller whined, and thumped his tail on the cushions. The Beloved's eyes were wet and misty, and a tear had fallen on to his rough coat. His doggy soul was in turmoil.

Suddenly he pricked his ears and listened intently. Footsteps in the marble-paved hall—drawing nearer. Deirdre searched wildly for a handkerchief. Then Lark threw open the door, and, a certain suppressed excitement in his tones, announced:

"The Earl of Liscarney."

Terence came in. Deirdre got hastily to her feet. They stood looking at each other for a minute. Then —how it happened Deirdre never knew—she was in his arms, crying, not as a child cries, but quietly and terribly, on his shoulder. Then they were sitting side by side, he wiping her face with a large silk handkerchief.

Mr. Weller sat between them, relieved and approving. Now that the Man God had come it would be all right, and his Beloved would look unhappy no more.

Deirdre gave a gasping sigh and sat up, actually smiling a pale little smile.

"Terry, you *dear!*" shakily.

He smiled at her, with that half-guilty air of awkwardness which always made him seem so boyish.

"Do you feel all right now, darling?"

"Yes, quite. It was silly of me—but seeing you standing there, so big and—and protect-y looking, it sort of put me off my balance. Terry, it's lovely to see you! Does it seem awful to say that you seem much more friendly and dear than my father and mother? They—they seem like strangers, somehow ——" Terry said nothing—he just held her brown hands in one of his own big ones. "Terry, I knew that you would come! It was lovely of you. How did you know?"

"Mr. Bellamy's chauffeur told my man—you know how things get round. So I caught the night train from Bamberly, and—here I am! Deirdre—I'm sorry——"

"Thank you, Terry dear. Darling Aunt Vi—I loved her. And she loved you, too——"

There was a silence for a minute. Then Terry:

"And what are you going to do now, Deirdre?"

"Mother wants me to go home with them after—the funeral. I am to go back"—she laughed a little bitterly—"to my old rôle of nursery governess. Exciting, isn't it?"

Terence was speaking, his words jumbling with excitement.

"Deirdre, you're not going. You can't go—I won't let you! You're going to marry me! You *must!* I'll make you happy—I swear I will! Deirdre, won't you try it?"

Deirdre looked at his flushed, boyish face, the eager eyes. Innate honesty compelled her to speak.

"Terence, if I do marry you, you must understand

that I am using you rather meanly as a way of escape. I can't go back again, to be shut in from all the things I love and want. *You* can get me out of it all for ever. But I must show you the bad bargain you're making first. Terry, I don't love you—at least, I do, awfully, but not in the right way. In time perhaps ——"

He was unshaken.

"I have enough for both of us, my dear, and there are all our lives before us for me to teach you."

Triumph was in his eyes, and an undaunted faith. Deirdre felt a little awed and remorseful that she could not return the great love he gave her. She said eagerly:

"Oh, I'll try to learn—I will, honestly. And I'll make you very happy, Terence, so that you will never regret the day you saw me."

He laughed a little as at a child.

"Yes, we'll be happy. We'll travel—you'd like that, darling? And I'll take care of you for ever—if you let me, Deirdre——"

A strange peace stealing over her soul, she picked up his hand and held it to her warm young cheek.

A week later they were married.

PART II

MANY WATERS . . .

CHAPTER VI

THE MOVING FINGER

I

DEIRDRE LISCARNEY sat before the oval glass in her bedroom, looking at herself with intent eyes.

Over two years had passed, and left little or no trace on the curving loveliness of her young face. She had, indeed, blossomed from an exquisite child into a beautiful woman. There was an added deepness to the translucent eyes, a warmer bloom on the delicately cut mouth. She had still retained that childish expression which was half her charm.

She wore that night a dress of her favourite colour —green, a pale, soft green like old Chinese jade, and over it a wonderful Spanish shawl, marvellously embroidered in dull oranges and vivid blues and lacquer greens on a silver ground.

As she stared so intently at herself in the glass, Deirdre was mentally reviewing the past two years.

They had been happy, as Terence predicted. They had spent almost the whole of the time in travel. Deirdre had seen all the beauty she had dreamt of— Venice in spring, with the gardens a-blow with iris and

narcissi, with wistaria drooping palest mauve tassels of blossom over the old grey walls, and the gondolier's musical cry coming like the wail of a wild bird over the water.

They had lingered in Venice—Terence rather bored, but enduring it for Deirdre's sake, consenting heroically to visiting picture galleries and churches; to poking about in musty old curiosity shops, buying Venetian glass and lengths of cobwebby lace, to stand upon the Bridge of Sighs and listen to Deirdre quoting Byron. In return for his heroism Deirdre was as charming as she could possibly be. She studied his interests, made herself look pretty for his benefit, and was never bad-tempered or sulky. If she kept her bargain with him, she also kept her bargain with herself. She refused to think of Guy, of his voice, his smile, his gay eyes. She crushed the spun-glass fantasy of that spring idyll beneath the spurred heel of common sense. It had been a hard fight to do so—not in the day-time so much, but at night, when, lying staring into the darkness, unbearably poignant memories would return to her—memories that stabbed like so many keen daggers. She had mastered herself now—could even think of it with a calm wonder at her own absurdity. But scores of times—in Rome or Algiers, or Paris—she had caught a glimpse of some tall, dark-headed boy making his casual way through a crowd, and had to set her teeth to prevent herself from springing up and running after him. But all that was over two years ago. Time can heal all wounds, and daffodils blow again over the graves of dead hopes.

They had left Venice for Rome, which had awed but not fascinated her, as the "sun-girt city" had done. After Italy came Spain, which she loved—Granada, that Spanish mistress still sighing for the fiery kisses of her Moorish lover. And then Africa itself—best of all, perhaps—Biskra, with its gay crowds, its green gardens, enclosed in their high white walls, and stretching as far as the eye could see, the inscrutable mystery of the desert.

Terry was happier there—he even enjoyed himself. The crowded bazaar appealed to his sociable soul as no dim church or marble palazzo in Venice had done—he liked buying things that caught his fancy, useful or otherwise—wrought silver daggers, scarlet Moorish slippers, beaten bronze lamps, strings of amber or lazuli, subtle, mysterious scents from the old, wrinkled perfume seller, which he presented to Deirdre in quaint gold-lined vials. She used to laugh at his proud, flushed face when he exhibited these purchases to her—but her laughter was very tender.

Terence had wakened the maternal side in her—she used to catch herself looking after the tall, white-clad figure, with its sleek fair head set so well on the broad shoulders, with almost intense pride.

They were both happy at Biskra. Terence never knew when he loved Deirdre best of all—perhaps in the early morning when in her severe white linen habit she would go riding with him in the desert. He had taught her to ride himself, in the hallowed precincts of Rotten Row, but even he was surprised and delighted at the skill with which she handled the fiery

Arab horses. Many were the gallops they had in the cool of the morning—Terence keeping a watchful though admiring eye on the boyish figure beside him, who managed the curvetting white mare with a reckless nonchalance which secretly amused him.

After Biskra had come home for a brief period.

They paid a flying visit to old Lady Liscarney, who was now living in the Dower House at Greyfriars.

It was in vain that Deirdre tried to foster an affection for her—there was *something* behind the expressionless eyes that vaguely repelled her. Was it dislike or jealousy, or the ghost of a great sorrow? Deirdre could not determine. Yet there was outwardly nothing to base her instinctive dislike on. The Dowager had received her son's wife with the most charming warmth, and had given her as a wedding present the most superb rope of pearls and a small but exquisite emerald tiara, "to go with your lovely eyes, Swallow——"

She was the sort of woman who is lavish with nicknames, and had at once christened Deirdre "Swallow," saying, with her wide, jolly smile, "You somehow suggest flight to me—something swift and beautiful. So I shall call you 'Swallow'—such a pretty bird, don't you think, with its sapphire blue feathers? And a lucky bird too, for it flies from the winter and everything unpleasant——"

Was there, perhaps, something a trifle acid in this last?

"I suppose," thought Deirdre angrily, "she knows about Aunt Vi's death, and thinks I married Terence

for his money. Well, I didn't—it wasn't so much that as to escape—to get out of my old, dull existence—— Well, let her think what she likes! Terence loves me, and I'm making him happy, anyway."

So she smiled her sweetest, and agreed that the swallow was a charming bird—so "Swallow" she remained. Still it was odd that she could not banish her old, instinctive distrust. On the surface the Dowager seemed to be the most jolly and charming of women, with her loud, hearty voice, her vast laugh—yet Deirdre found herself watching her, warily, and being mentally on her guard. Also she noticed that while the narrow lips smiled, the hard grey eyes remained cold and expressionless.

"They're dead eyes," thought the young countess with a shudder. "Dead, staring eyes like an octopus is supposed to have! Ugh! How glad I am that Terence is like his father!"

She had seen the portrait of Dermot, 9th Earl of Liscarney, in the picture gallery—a big, fair man, with a weak mouth and gay, intensely blue eyes which laughed down at her from his gold frame. He had been killed when his little son was not quite eight, in an accident on the hunting field.

After the flying visit to the Dowager, they had gone to the Clement Street house for a month or so, and then, after a hectic whirl of everything which could be packed into the short time, sailed for New York.

Deirdre loved the voyage—she would have liked to prolong it indefinitely. She was a good sailor—she liked the long lazy days, the starry nights, which

brought her closer and closer to the huge, towering city she had dreamt of so often.

She was the most popular girl on board—the universal way in which the masculine element gravitated towards her was wonderful in its unanimity. The acid gossip that floated round the quarter where the Unfair Sex gathered in their deck-chairs give damning verdicts on the dress, manner and morals of their fellow-passengers, put down their conduct not so much as "wonderful," but "scandalous."

"With a charming husband of her own, too!" said Mrs. Khelveston-Smith (pronounced "Keston") with a sniff that made the nostrils of her aristocratic nose quiver like a rabbit's.

The "charming husband" was, however, perfectly happy. He was also not a little proud of his wife's popularity—his eyes would follow her round the room as she danced after dinner, never forgetting to throw him an adorable smile as she drifted past, or played deck-golf and shuffle-board, her straight figure, in its simple white gowns, moving with the grace and swiftness of an athletic boy.

Terence enjoyed the voyage as much as his wife did. If he did not have her as much to himself as he could have wished, yet there were compensations.

There were nights when they sat in their deck-chairs on the cool, deserted fore-deck, watching the smooth snake-like sheet of rippling water, that gleamed with a strange, lustrous darkness under the stars, and talking in the soft, hushed tones that the night demanded. Then through the gloom Deirdre's face would shine

white like some strange tropical flower, framed in the black softness of her hair, and her dress, too, would gleam pale as the petals of a magnolia blossom. Terence would sit watching her in silent ecstasy—watching the little shadows round her mouth, the wide, deep softness of her shadowed eyes. Oh, certainly, there were compensations.

And New York itself, once reached, fulfilled all Deirdre's dreams. They took a suite at the Plaza, and proceeded to enjoy life in the way that is only possible if one marches under the twin banners of Wealth and Youth. Yet, although New York fascinated and stupefied her, it did not make the same appeal to Deirdre as London had done.

"New York is intensely alive and noisy, and full of pep," she said to Terence one day as they were walking up Fifth Avenue. "But London is more personal. One is like a very jolly acquaintance—the other is an intimate friend."

Terry agreed heartily—he had the true Englishman's love for London.

"Tell you what—shall we take the next boat home?" he enquired hopefully.

"*Silly*—of course not! Why, I haven't half seen all I want to! Besides, we're going to California!"

So to California they went—to Los Angeles, where they saw the huge glass studios of the film colony, and, to Deirdre's unfeigned delight, caught a brief glimpse of a small, slim young man who was pointed out to them as the One and Only Charles Chaplin.

And then it was home again—home to dear, smoky

old London, beginning to yield to spring's kisses—home to the big house in Clement Street, with its wrought-iron gates, its lofty rooms.

Almost as soon as they settled down Olivia had appeared upon the scene to spend her holidays with them. Mrs. Bellamy, it appeared, had quite suddenly developed bad health, for which change of air was imperative. So "Green Gables" had been sold, and they rented a villa just outside Mentone, which arrangement pleased Ralph Bellamy, now retired from business, not a little.

Terence and his wife had stayed with them there for a week on their way from Italy. Mrs. Bellamy seemed subtly changed, and even happy in a quiet way. As for her husband, he had the dazed air of a man who is in Paradise, and dreads the moment when he shall find it is but a dream. Deirdre had been oddly touched—she could not have said why.

II

Of all this Deirdre was thinking as she sat before the glass in her white and gold bedroom. She was very happy—quietly happy. Terence had been to her like a calm, safe port after storm. He had taken such care of her—nothing was too good for her in his estimation.

After two years of married life he still felt a small tingling shock of delight when he saw her—was still discovering fresh beauties about her hair, her eyes, her long, slim hands. Deirdre noticed the little ways

in which he tried to please her—the dull books he read, that he had seen her reading, the flowers that always appeared mysteriously with her morning tea—hundreds of little things like that. It all touched and pleased her very much, although it struck her as a little pathetic—that dog-like wish to please the Loved One.

Terry could not understand her—he never tried to—she was gloriously remote and rare. Her thoughts instead of keeping to the earth flew among the stars like birds. It was a touch of genius which had made the Dowager christen Deirdre "Swallow." There was something swift and fine about her—she skimmed and darted through Life just as a swallow skims and darts over a field of clover, the dark sapphire of his breast and narrow wings flashing against the rose-scarlet of the flowers. Terence did not attempt to follow her—he just watched patiently until his beautiful bird should swoop to earth again. But he pathetically tried to please her—to bring his intellect up to the level of hers. And they managed, notwithstanding the extreme difference in their temperaments, to be very happy.

Even as Deirdre sat there, absently twisting the big square emerald on one of her fingers round and round, the door flew open with a crash and Olivia skimmed into the room.

At seventeen Olivia was making a fair bid to being a beauty. The period when she had been all long arms and legs and crumpled pink gingham had vanished, and now, although she was tall, there was grace

in her slender height. She would never be as lovely as Deirdre, for her mouth was wide, though well shaped, and her nose had a decided tilt which lent an added piquance to the vivid face. Everywhere she went Olivia was a favourite, although she was still something of an "enfant terrible," and the violence of her temper had increased rather than decreased with time. Yet everyone loved her, temper and all into the bargain. There was something about the glowing face, crowned with its boyish mop of dark curls, that strangely attracted.

She entered the room in her usual whirlwind fashion, whistling "If Winter Comes" like a shrill bullfinch.

"Halloa!" she said breezily. "Aren't you ready yet, old thing? The c-car's at the door, and Terry is champing round ye N-noble Hall gnashing his teeth."

They were going that night to Covent Garden to hear Callaveni sing in "Madame Butterfly." Olivia was in a ferment of excitement. She preened herself like a gay little peacock in front of the big mirror, lifting up the rosy pink cloak to admiringly contemplate the pearly chiffons beneath, and the small silver brocaded feet.

"I must say," she said complacently, "I don't look b-bad. As for you, darling, you look a peach! I say, aren't you ready? We s-shall be awfully late."

Deirdre smiled, sighed, and got up, holding the Spanish scarf round her shoulders.

"I'm quite ready—to be truthful, I have been for the last ten minutes."

"O-oh—I suppose you've been sitting with that far-away expression thinking of g-goodness knows what, haven't you? You always used to get those fits, even at 'Green Gables'—they used to g-give me the p-p-pip——" She saw a large silver-framed photo of Mrs. Bellamy on a side table, and made a face at it. "Why on earth s-stick that old d-d-devil's phiz up like that—as large as life? Goodness knows, we don't want to r-r-remember her!"

Deirdre frowned.

"Shut up, Liv. You're not to say things like that!"

Olivia raised her black brows to a comic height.

"And since when did this t-t-touching solicitude begin? You usen't to be as good as all that, my dear."

"I know—but She's different now—honestly, Livvy. I think She's sorry—just as I am. After all, she's our mother——"

"*Mother!*" Olivia's red-flecked eyes flashed with scorn—she stamped her small, sandalled foot. "Oh, she's reformed, has she? Wants to do the Reconciliation Act? Well, she sh-han't! N-n-n-not with me, anyway! *Mother!* Why, I'd rather call old N-Nick 'Mother' than her!" She hitched up her rose velvet cloak and departed, throwing over her shoulder: "Do buck up! We shall c-cut it awfully f-f-fine!"

Deirdre followed more slowly.

She found Olivia, now quite unruffled, dancing the tango with her brother-in-law in the hall. Howard, also spending the holidays with them, was looking on and applauding. He took her arm as she came down the wide staircase.

"Here she is—at last! Dash it, what a time girls take just putting on a gew-gaw like this!"

And he twitched a corner of the wonderful Spanish shawl. The two stopped dancing—Olivia skipped through the glassed-in portico and down the steps to where the Rolls was waiting. Terence managed to murmur to his wife as they followed together:

"You look topping, darling—absolutely stunning!"

In every dress he saw her in it was the same—Terence was one of those simple souls who are continually finding fresh wonders in the things they possess. And Deirdre was so unexpected. When he thought that he knew her inside out he would discover something new which before his slow eyes had passed over—the delicate blue traceries of a vein in the pearly smoothness of her arm, a lilac shadow in the clustering hair by her little ear, the way that her eyes had of warming into laughter before her mouth did.

It was all very bewildering and beautiful. And, when in the darkness of the big car, he felt her hand creep into his big one, in thanks for the praise, life just then was very sweet to Terence Liscarney.

But Deirdre felt a heavy sense of oppression. She had that delicate seventh sense which gave her the power to know when something important was going to happen. Her sensitive being felt something vaguely electric in the air—a feeling evidently not shared by the other three, who sat laughing and chattering, looking out at the lighted streets. But Deirdre sat silent, wishing she was not going to the opera. She pictured

herself sitting with a new novel in her white and gold boudoir at home—the tall orange-shaded lamps would be lit—she would be sitting among the cushions on the sofa, with Sam the Sealyham curled up on a fold of her skirt. Mentally she gave herself a shake, trying to stave off that heavy sense of foreboding. She began to laugh and joke with the others—but at the back of her laughter it still lurked, like a serpent coiling among roses.

They had certainly "cut it very fine," as Olivia had predicted. They just had time to enter their box and settle down when the curtain rose. Deirdre forgot her fears in the beautiful music—listening dreamily with half-shut eyes. Callaveni was singing in it—it seemed incredible that so slight and small a woman should have such a magnificent voice. It soared without effort, like a bird's—Deirdre thought, as she had often thought—"I'll never sing again after this—it would seem like desecration."

The great prima donna was unique in one respect—she could act as well as sing. The child-like pathos of the character she created was wonderful. Poor little Madame Butterfly—such a slight, pathetic figure in her coral-pink kimono, with her pale face, her tragic eyes.

Deirdre was somehow glad when the interval came; she could not have said why. Suddenly she wished that they had gone to "Frills" at the Gaiety, or something jolly like that—this was so dreadfully sad, and she did not want to be sad that night.

She turned to Howard (Olivia was still speechless

from the shattering effects of her first opera) and began to talk almost desperately lightly. Terence had left the box.

Howard was quite unaffected by the music—his was a stolid soul. He looked at the people in the boxes through Deirdre's opera-glasses.

"Who's the old girl in black, with diamonds, like pullets' eggs all over her? By Gad, *what* diamonds! She looks like one of those blue velvet necks you see in jewellers' windows—absolutely blazing! My hat, that's a stunning girl in pink with her! Do you know who it is, Deirdre? She looks a ripper——" Without waiting for an answer he rattled on gaily. "Look, that's Fifi Fiora, isn't it? In a red affair, with the old johnny with white whiskers——"

Deirdre looked, and nodded.

"Yes—the 'old johnny' is Prince Ponkoffri."

"I say, not really? She looks rather stunning, don't you think. Livvy, your idol, Fifi Fiora, is in the box opposite!"

Even the mention of the lady who a few months ago had adorned her bedroom on glossy picture postcards failed to rouse Olivia. Through her sensitive little being still soared and thrilled the glorious voice of Madame Butterfly. . . .

"Oh, shut up," she said crossly, "I don't care if it's the Archangel G-Gabriel—only do be quiet!"

Howard looked at her with comical pity.

"How have the mighty fallen!" he said to Deirdre. "Tell you what it is—she hauled me off to take her to the 'Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse' last week,

and now she's got a crush on Rudolph Valentino! That's it, isn't it, Baby?"

Deirdre left them bickering, and scanned the house with the glasses Howard had discarded.

It was a brilliant assembly. The lights glistened on orders and jewels, on pearly shoulders and softly waved hair, on the beautiful dresses of the women and the uniforms of the men. Another time Deirdre would have been enjoying herself immensely—taking in the brilliant scene with the keenest zest. But to-night even her powers of enjoyment seemed dulled. The heavy sense of oppression was weighing her down. She watched the people listlessly, picking out a famous Cabinet Minister, a great novelist, a world-famous actress, still regally beautiful in her golden cloak, with its huge collar of white fox. She became conscious that her heart was beating faster—that even the hand that held the glasses was a little unsteady.

Then Terry was beside her—she felt it, although she did not turn. She heard his voice, boyishly excited.

"Deirdre, such luck! I ran against 'Jingle' Wyndham—you know, I told you about him—my fag at Winchester! Haven't seen him for three years!"

Deirdre made an effort to rouse herself—to shake off that dreadful feeling of doom.

Terence's gay, excited voice—pride was in it too.

"I brought him along with me. Jingle, this is—my wife!"

Deirdre turned, smiling.

She found herself looking up into the laughing dark eyes of—the boy in Gilly's Wood. . . .

III

They stood looking at each other for what seemed eternity. Deirdre felt the colour slowly ebb from her face. She saw laughter die in the dark eyes, to be succeeded by a terrible strained look that made his young face look suddenly old.

Then Deirdre did the bravest thing of her life. She laughed—and Heaven knows what it cost her, that natural, light laugh.

"Why, we've met before, I think!"

He recovered himself—only Deirdre's eyes saw that mental pulling together and squaring of shoulders. There was something a trifle defiant in it.

"How funny that we should meet like this again!"

Terence delighted, but a little bewildered, looked enquiringly from one to the other.

"But I've spoken to you of Jingle, Deirdre—often, and you've never said anything!"

Suddenly she was feeling amazingly clear-headed and steady—perfectly mistress of the situation.

"Why, you old silly, you said his name was *George* Wyndham! And it's Guy—not George!"

"Oh Lord, did I? Well, we always used to call him Jingle at school! But it's topping—absolutely topping that you've met each other before!"

He looked from one to the other with affectionate pride. Only Olivia, looking on in her corner, sensed the vague tenseness in the situation. Terry was as happily oblivious as a child. He turned to answer a

laughing remark of Howard's, and Deirdre and Guy were left together.

He sat down by her, still looking at her with the old, audacious gaze. Something told her that now the audacity was put to veil a hurt—a suddenly laid bare wound, guarded by the spangled gossamer of Laughter. Now she could see him properly for the first time. He had not changed. There was the same thin, dark-skinned face, with its well-cut, sensitive mouth, its very bright dark eyes under their black brows. He was as tall as Terry, but of quite a different build—long-limbed and slender, with the broad shoulders and narrow hips of a thoroughbred.

This was the face she had looked for in crowds at the theatre, in shops—to find it now—too late. She realized the truth she had refused to believe—that it was inevitable that Guy Wyndham should ride back into her life again, as suddenly as he had left it. Decreed by Fate—the Will of Allah——

Suddenly she came back to herself with a start. Her surroundings had given place for a moment to the bluebell lacquered slopes of Gilly's Wood, where she had sat looking into those same dark eyes. . . .

"Callaveni is singing divinely to-night, isn't she?"

"Magnificently——"

The curt word seemed to tick in her brain, like a clock—"Magnificently. . . ." It suddenly struck her as absurd. Why had he not said "Awfully jolly!" as Terence would have done? Or anything but that one word.

"Magnificently . . magnificently. . . ."

Then the lights went out—Deirdre was glad. The darkness was round her—enveloping her, like cool, refreshing water. She heard Terence:

"Who are you with—the Landals? Well, you can stay for this Act, old boy, can't you?"

He stayed. She did not look round, but in every fibre and nerve of her she felt his presence. Once she turned her head and saw him looking at her—looking intently, strangely, in the old, remembered way. She found herself remembering lots of little things—the way his nostrils quivered, like those of a sensitive, thoroughbred horse when he was excited or moved by anything. The way his mouth curled in that half-mocking, half-tender smile. The lazy huskiness of his voice.

Mentally she shook herself, forcing her mind to forget. . . . Callaveni's glorious voice, soaring in sobbing catches and trills, like a nightingale among the syringas singing in the June dusk——

"My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains my sense. . . ."

The words slipped into Deirdre's thoughts like a string of pearls—a trickle of moonlight.

Olivia was crying—the tears wet on her cheeks. Even Howard was listening raptly, and with a queer, stirred feeling of emotion. But for two people in the box the opera meant nothing. Deirdre listened mechanically, the beauty of that golden voice vaguely saddening her.

"My heart aches . . . my heart aches . . ."

She gripped her hands together, so hard that the big square emerald bit into the flesh.

The lights went up again, after the great waves of applause had subsided. Wyndham and Terence were talking—then Terence's voice came to her.

"I was just saying to Jingle that he must come and dine with us to-morrow, and that in August he must come to Greyfriars, Deirdre——"

"My heart aches. . . ."

And then——

"Ah, God—don't come, don't come!—I can't bear it—oh, coward, coward! My heart aches. . . ."

Only Guy saw the supreme courage of her smile. There was something of the fighting spirit in her green eyes.

"That will be splendid! We will expect you to-morrow, then? Good-bye—it was so nice seeing you again!"

She felt exactly like a mechanical doll—a puppet playing a part. He took her cold fingers in his warm ones, and bowed over them with a touch of foreign grace. Then he was gone—Deirdre saw him reappear in an opposite box.

The rest of the time was like a nightmare. She felt Olivia's remarkably shrewd eyes looking at her once or twice, and her relentless courage flogged her drooping spirits onward. She was gay—recklessly, defiantly gay. All at once her lips gained bloom, and her eyes sparkled. Terence looked at her proudly as she chattered and laughed with an almost hectic rose staining the smooth whiteness of her skin.

Then it was all over—thank God, it was all over. The brilliant, laughing crowd in the foyer—out into

the night air—the cushioned warmth of the big car. Deirdre sank back in her corner, her eyelids drooping like weary white petals on the rose of her cheek. Dimly she heard the other three talking, laughing, criticising.

"I think that f-friend of yours is a darling, Terry," Olivia was saying. "Is he an Italian? He looks it—that black hair, and those lazy dark eyes. Did you n-notice his voice? All sort of d-drawl-ey and soft——"

Howard gave a shout of laughter.

"Now she's off! So Rudolph Valentino has been given the go-by for this new hero has he? Oh ye Family, prepare yourselves for hymns of praise about his 'lazy eyes,' and his 'divine smile,' and 'drawl-ey voice' for a week or so, until Livvy goes and gets a crush on Matheson Lang or the Prince of Wales or someone like that!"

"Oh, shut up, you reptile!" said Olivia crossly. "Terence, if you want to do me a f-f-favour, take this out and drown it! Only mind the p-p-p-pond's deep where you p-push him in! But, seriously, is that boy Italian, or S-s-spanish, or something exciting? I can just imagine him being the idol of S-spain, like that matador in 'B-b-blood and Sand,' or having a murderous v-v-ventilator with an enemy——"

Howard gave another bellow.

"Bless the child! It's 'vendetta,'" Miss Malaprop, not 'ventilator'!"

"Oh well, it's n-near enough!" said his sister with unruffled calm. "Do tell me, Terry—I am hugely

th-thrilled!" And in withering aside—"I can see you g-g-grinning, you fool, so you needn't think I c-can't!"

Terence, who was extremely fond of his small but volcanic sister-in-law, hastened to settle the question.

"I believe there's Italian blood somewhere in Mrs. Wyndham's family—I know loads of people take Jingle for a Spaniard or Italian. But it's ripping seeing him again—the last time I saw him was when he and his mother came to stay at Greyfriars, nearly three years ago." He turned to Deirdre—"Isn't it topping seeing the old fellow again, Deirdre?"

She tried to shake off the stupor that weighed her down.

"Awfully topping. . . ."

He heard the weariness in her voice.

"Why, littlest, I believe you're dead tired! I shall tuck you up in bed myself——"

Deirdre smiled drowsily—what a darling Terry was!

The car was stopping—she braced herself to get out, to walk across what seemed acres of glistening pavement. It had been raining a little—an April shower. There was a delicious softness in the air—over the trees sailed the thread of silver that was the new moon. Something made her pause on the steps and look across the silent road to the white house with its green sunblinds—to the unlighted window behind which she had slept so many happy nights. Then she turned and followed her sister into the hall.

Soup and sandwiches were waiting for them. Deir-

dre declined both, and started to mount the seemingly endless stairs to her bedroom. Up and up—she started counting them mechanically—one, two, three, four —— Her bedroom at last. A rosy fire was leaping on the hearth—she felt glad of its warmth. The yellow-shaded lamps looked like glowing tulips of light —there was a bowl of lavender-streaked iris on a side table.

Deirdre sat down in one of the big black and gold arm-chairs and leant back among the soft Chinese blue cushions. She had told Parker not to wait up for her. Presently she roused herself and started to undress. Terence came in when she was plaiting her hair. She smiled at him rather wanly.

"I loved it to-night, Terry darling."

"But you're tired now, Baby—don't pretend you're not! I'll put you to bed every night myself at six o'clock in future."

She put the tortoise-shell brush with its gold crest down, and turned, still smiling. In a black and gold kimono, with glimpses of a lacy, palest yellow *crêpe de Chine* nightie underneath, she looked about twelve. Her face between the heavy braids of black hair, was pale as a crescent moon.

"But I'm not as stupid as all this generally, am I, Terry?"

"It's not stupid—it's just the adorable thing a baby like you might be expected to do." He became suddenly severe and business-like. "Now then, are you ready? One, two, three—here goes!"

Lord Liscarney picked up his wife as if she was the

baby he called her, marched across the room, and put her down on the bed. Off came the kimono, off came the little fur-lined satin mules. Then he pulled up the bed-clothes, punched the pile of frilly pillows, and tucked her in with an air of professional nonchalance which was really very funny. Sleepily she watched him putting her clothes in a neat pile on a chair, and by their side her silver slippers, looking like two forlorn little feet.

Then the lights went out, and in the rosy gloom he bent down to kiss her. Warm bare arms went round his neck, and a small voice whispered:

"Terry, you darling!"

It was ample reward. Terence went out walking on air.

Left alone in the fire-lit darkness, Deirdre lay thinking of many things. The dearness of Terry, and her own unworthiness—Guy's eyes, strained and horrified —no, no, she must not think of that. She would see him again to-morrow—was she glad or sorry? A small voice within her whispered that she was neither glad nor sorry, but afraid. Afraid—of what? Swift came the answer. The power of Fate. . . .

Deirdre set her teeth hard. A touch of the deathless courage which had served her soldier ancestors well—at Agincourt, Sedgemoor, Waterloo—flamed in her again. She would fight—and win—for Terence's sake, for her own sake. But chiefly for Terry's. Terry, who loved her. Terry, who had told her, with love in his frank eyes, that she "couldn't do anything that wasn't straight and open and honest——"

Well, she would be straight—she would play fair, keeping to the rules of the Game with him.

And yet——

"We can't fight against it; it's—Kismet."

The words came back into her memory. Kismet—the Will of Allah. But she *would* fight against all the Fates in the world, and win through—for Terry's sake.

Her brain began to get clouded. Things all jumbled together in it. Madame Butterfly, in her coral-pink kimono—Terence, tucking her up and kissing her,—someone saying that it was Kismet—impossible to fight,—Kismet, the Will of Allah—a boy's voice—dark eyes,—and bluebells——

Deirdre fell asleep.

CHAPTER VII

COURAGE

I

At luncheon the next day Terence said suddenly: "By Gad, I forgot all about to-night! Hang it all! Deirdre, I've got to go and take the chair at that confounded dinner—you know, the Wanderers' Club! And old Jingle's coming along."

Deirdre played with the long string of jade round her neck.

"Shall I 'phone and put him off then?"

"Oh—no—you and he will like to have a pow-wow, I expect. It's rotten luck, though. Never mind—I want him to come down to Greyfriars for Easter."

They were all going down the following Wednesday.

Howard grinned.

"That will be fine for Livvy. You'll have the time of your life, won't you, Babe?"

Olivia ignored him with pointed scorn.

"Where does your Jingle hang out?"

"He has chambers at the Aldwych—just come back

from Venice, where his mother died last winter. Been living there for some time."

Venice—she had been there for months and had never seen him! It struck Deirdre as ironically humorous.

"Why didn't you look him up when we were there?"

"To tell you the truth I never knew he was there! I heard from him in Florence about two years ago, and then—well, sort of drifted apart. It was just luck that I ran into him last night."

"Has he any people?"

"None that I know of. Good old Jingle, we must see a lot of him now."

So when Guy Wyndham was shown into the large Louis Seize drawing-room that night he found only Deirdre awaiting him—Deirdre in a black gauzy dress that made her arms gleam pearly white, with her black hair swept high and caught above the ear with a silver filagree comb.

The unexpectedness of her standing slim and straight in the soft rose-shaded light made him wince as if from the sting of a lash. After a formal greeting they stood looking at each other, quite quietly and gravely, as the boy and girl of Gilly's Wood had done. Yet there was Something underneath the look, some subtle question and answer asked and given in silence. Suddenly Deirdre remembered herself.

"Won't you sit down? Olivia and Howard will be here in a moment."

They sat down side by side on a low couch. Sam, the Sealyham, feeling something vaguely disturbing

in the air, sat between them, watching intently with his bright, intelligent eyes. Again a little silence fell, broken only by the grinding of taxis and the roar of distant traffic outside. There were flowers everywhere —a crystal bowl of tight yellow tulips among their crisp shiny leaves, jars of pheasant's eye narcissi and golden jonquils, filling the air with heavy fragrance.

Deirdre was the first to break the silence.

"Why didn't you come again?" she asked quite simply and directly, knowing that they were both thinking of their last meeting in Gilly's Wood.

Guy did not answer at once—he sat with his dark head bent, fondling the little white dog. Deirdre watched, with a curious intentness those long brown fingers caressing the soft ears.

"I never mentioned my father to you, did I?"

She shook her head gravely.

"He and my mother were parted when I was only a kid. That afternoon we got a cable saying that he was dying in Florence. She had loved him all the time, I think—she went to him at once—I had to go with her——" He lifted a face which was suddenly strangely haggard. "Oh, God, Deirdre"—the half-agonized cry burst from him—"I tried to get to the Wood—to leave a message for you—to tell you my name. But we left at once—my mother was ill—everything was in a muddle and confusion. It was only later on that I realized—I had lost you——"

She felt amazingly calm, cool-headed and sane. Her voice was very gentle when she spoke.

"Guy—all that is over now——"

"Yes—it's all over—now." He smiled at her with a gallant return to his former imperturbability.

They smiled at each other, making a gallant show of bravery.

"And you were staying at the time——?"

"At Greyfriars. Yes—funny tricks Fate plays sometimes, doesn't she?"

"And afterwards——?"

"My mother never came back to England. Her health was absolutely broken down. She bought a villa in Venice, and lived there until—last winter——"

Deirdre looked at him with the soft, shining eyes he remembered so well.

"I know—Guy, I'm sorry—more sorry than I can say."

He said brusquely:

"I believe you are——"

Again there was a tiny pause. Then Deirdre:

"Did you stay in Venice, too?"

"Only for vacation—I went up to Oxford, as I told you I was going to do. Once or twice I went down to Bamberly—hung about the town and the wood in the hopes of seeing you. But you were never there——"

"No, I was gone," said Deirdre quietly.

The door flew open with a crash, and Olivia, late as usual, flew in, a whirl of filmy skirts and flying feet, pursued by Howard, roaring with laughter, just as the gong rang. Their coming relieved the tension. Explanations as to Terry's absence being rather tardily given, the four went in to dinner.

It was a merry little meal. Guy had shaken off his

mood, and kept them all laughing. Deirdre, too, seemed to have gained brilliance and life—her eyes shone, her mouth curved. Many were the airy little verbal skirmishes she and Guy had, in which honours were fairly equally divided. Olivia thought shrewdly, watching the two with keen eyes, that it was almost too clever to be natural—it was as if they were rattling off a part they had learnt. Now and again their eyes would meet over the silver bowl of rosy tulips, meet again in that odd question and answer, that demanding and reassuring, a challenge flung down and snatched up defiantly, proudly. . . .

After dinner the drawing-room again, with its shaded lights, its bowls of flowers. Deirdre wished restlessly that they were on the moors, with the wind blowing in their faces, with heather and bracken underfoot, instead of this atmosphere of flower-scented warmth and luxurious beauty. She went to one of the long windows that opened on to a wide balcony, and flung it wide. Outside it was a mild, warm night, powdered with stars in a clear purple sky. Guy watched the slim black figure, standing there with her arms outspread, holding back the doors—on the stone outside her shadow fell in the shape of a cross. . . .

She came back and sat down in a big chair near the window, and called to Olivia to play something.

Olivia sat down at the big grand piano at the other end of the room, with Howard standing by her. Guy fetched over a dumpy pouffe and sat down by Deirdre's chair. They were practically alone—the other two were paying no attention to them.

Olivia had dashed with reckless rhythm into "And Her Mother Came Too——" Her sister called out sharply:

"Not that, Livvy! Play something that I like ——"

Olivia cast an impish look over her shoulder, hesitated a moment, then plunged with her usual impetuosity into the wailing discords of a Hungarian dance.

Two years of study under a good master had far removed her from the days of the torturing "Jolly Peasant." Her technique was far from good, but she had a certain flair for interpreting music well—almost a genius for bold splashes of colour, for putting life and soul and her own vivid personality into the music. To-night she was on her mettle—she made of the Hungarian dance a weird, barbaric, haunting thing—primitive yet plaintive, full of savage passion, but still grippingly pathetic. It fitted in with Deirdre's mood—she listened to the minor melody with an aching heart.

Then Guy was speaking very low.

"So you escaped after all, Deirdre?"

She nodded without speaking, her eyes very brave.

"Terence is a fine chap—a splendid fellow. I am glad you are happy, Deirdre."

Again she bent her head, not speaking.

That music—haunting, wailing, in its barbaric discords.

"Did you forget me?" she said softly—"I wondered if you would——"

"No——" said the boy curtly. "No——"

It was true what he said. He had never forgotten her. When he was at the 'Varsity—at Venice—in London—in his gayest, maddest moments a sudden memory of her face would come back to him—her face with its shining eyes, its childish innocence—a memory of her forlorn, wistful voice—"You'll have people to love you—I have no one. I shall be alone again—all alone——"

Anger had always flooded him when he thought of this—anger against her mother who "hated her"—blind, helpless anger against himself for losing her after he had found her. These fits made him extremely miserable—the knowledge of the hopelessness of ever finding her again. As he had said, he went down to Bamberly several times, and made fruitless enquiries. Terence was away—on his honeymoon, he was told. Oh, the irony of it all. As he thought of it bitterness flooded his soul—yet when he looked up the dark eyes were clear and steady.

"If only we had told each other our names!"

"It was my fault—*all* my fault——"

The minor movement had ended, to give place to a crashing tumult of wild exultation.

Deirdre said suddenly:

"And your writing—what about that, Guy?"

He seemed to rouse himself.

"My first novel is to come out next month," he said. "It's the first thing I've done, except a short story or two——"

"But that's splendid, Guy! I knew you'd get on! I said so! What is it called?"

"Search," he said briefly, not looking at her.

Olivia had slipped from the plaintive finale of the Hungarian dance into one of Chopin's waltzes. Deirdre was glad somehow—the wild music had touched a chord in her, intensified some vague, aching longing which disturbed her gallant poise. This was more soothing—it was like a cool breeze, a few lines of Shelley——

The music had ceased abruptly. Olivia slipped off the piano stool and came forward, her filmy skirts whisking.

"There!" she said gaily. "My f-fingers are all tied up in a knot! Now, Deirdre, you must sing—do b-be a lamb! Have you ever heard her sing, Jingle?" She added with a funny look of mingled audacity and apology—"Do you mind if I c-call you Jingle? I can n-n-never remember s-surnames!"

"I should love you to!" said Wyndham gallantly. "Everybody does!"

She perched on the arm of Deirdre's chair, her pretty feet swinging.

"Why do they c-call you J-j-jingle!" she asked with interest.

"Oh, I don't know! Nicknames never have much sense in them, do you think? They gave me the title at school—because someone said I was 'always jingling off chunks of poetry, even in my sleep!' The idea stuck—so you behold me 'Jingle' to this day!"

Olivia said reflectively:

"Oh well, it's n-n-not so bad as nicknames go! They're f-feeble things, though, as you say. But now,

darling, d-d-*do* go and sing something. I haven't heard you for ages!"

Mechanically Deirdre obeyed her. There was a book of Chaminade's Songs open on the rack. She started to play the accompaniment.

Guy listened to the clear voice, a sick misery pervading his soul.

Then he lifted his head, and saw Olivia looking at him with shrewd brown eyes. Perhaps she saw the misery in his face that he had not time to hide, for swift sympathy stole into those steady eyes.

She knew nothing of what had happened—did not even know where her sister had met this boy—but she guessed with remarkable shrewdness more than either of them knew. And she leant forward swiftly, and said one brief, curt word—

"Steady!"

They looked at each other for a minute silently. Warning was mingled with the sympathy in those brown eyes. A defiant courage was in the darker ones looking up at her. Then Guy smiled, with a return to his old, gay audacity.

"Thanks, my dear," he said gently.

He knew that he had gained a staunch and invaluable ally——

Later on, when he had gone, Howard started to tease Olivia.

"Bad luck, old dear! He wasn't so smitten as you thought he'd be, was he? Ah well, try, try again is a good motto to fall back on!"

His sister turned on him in a sudden fury.

"Oh, g-go to Hell!" she said angrily, and tore like a small whirlwind out of the room.

II

Greyfriars in Spring.

Deirdre had never been there before—or rather, only for a flying visit—but never as its mistress. As the car turned in at the wrought-iron gates, with its fierce, crouching stags guarding it, she looked out of the window with sudden eagerness. Yes—there was the humped, fairy-tale lodge, in its garden all gay with blowing daffodils and stocky hyacinths, pink and blue, and—yes, there was the very same sleek black cat, sitting on the pocket handkerchief lawn, rounding off an ear with the aloof nonchalance of a Chinese madarin.

"Well!" said Olivia. "For goodness' sake look at Deirdre! You'd think someone had left her a f-f-fortune! Do you feel very happy, honey?"

"Awfully!" said her sister, and smiled into Terence's eyes.

Greyfriars in Spring——

How beautiful it was! The old Tudor House with its pointed turrets, its many windows, seemed to lay a gentle hand on the turmoil of Deirdre's thoughts. It was as if it said—"Look at me, standing here so serenely! I am old, centuries old. I have seen wars and sadness and tears—but I hide it all under my calm dignity——" The dear old house—it always reminded her of a *grande dame*—some old marquise or duchess, perhaps—in her faded glories, serene,

dignified, perhaps a little aloof under her gentleness. It taught Deirdre many lessons, that old grey house, with its quiet beauty——

Along the west side ran a long terrace, whose flights of mossy steps were bordered with brave splashes of iris. The gardens round the house were enclosed by a high wall from the rest of the park, broken at intervals by quaint wrought-iron gates, each with their fiercely crouching stag a-top.

Greyfriars Park was famed for its chestnut trees. The long avenue was bordered with them—their delicate rose white flowers lay thick in the road, like sunset flushed snow. The gardens themselves were ablaze with colour. Daffodils danced under the trees, tulips and blood-red wallflowers stood cheek by jowl, fragile orange-eyed narcissi jostled with dumpy hyacinths, the big orchard was a misty veil of blossom, the snowy white of plum and pear, the faint pink of apple.

Spring went to Deirdre's head. She never looked more vividly, startlingly beautiful. Olivia, too, seemed to throw off all restraint, and become again the hoyden Olivia, with her curly bobbed hair, her short skirts, her swift feet. She played many a heated set with Howard on the hard court—she took Terence's best driver and practised shots in the park—she climbed all the trees in the orchard and nearly drove old Hobbs, the head gardener, into a fine frenzy.

They were all happy at Greyfriars, from Terence, who had Deirdre to himself all day, to the Sealyham, who, directed by the other canine members of the

ménage—a red setter, two fox terriers, and a fat St. Bernard puppy—had discovered that the park was the haunt and rendezvous of—rabbits!

Terence was always happiest when at Greyfriars. He was not fond of society, and dreaded the hectic whirl of the London season. The estate was his one consuming passion—he ran it on model lines, was a hard-working, conscientious landlord, and took a keen interest in all agricultural matters. His tenants adored him—he listened to all their grievances, and was fair to every one of them. Terry's idea of bliss was to tramp round the estate in disreputable tweeds, with a pack of dogs at his heels, and generally to play the part of a model landlord. Deirdre was pleased to see his utter absorption with his farms and tenants—he was happy, and engrossed with several new schemes.

On Easter Saturday the guests arrived—Guy Wyndham, Gervase Wycome, and Dahlia, who, in the teeth of parental opposition, had married him the month after Deirdre's own wedding. With them was to come the Hope of the Wycomes—Rupert Terence, a stout fellow of one and a half, who for obvious reasons, had been dubbed "Porthos" by his father. The same, shortened to "Porthy," and, by that hero himself to "Porzie," had stuck, to the great vexation of his fond mamma, who, when she remembered, addressed him as "Rupert."

Much as Deirdre looked forward to seeing them again, yet with her anticipation was mingled a faint dread of—she could not say what.

The afternoon of their arrival she stepped out from

the long windows of the drawing-room on to the terrace, in search of Terence. Hobbs was weeding a bed of flamboyant peacock tulips just outside, humped up on a square of matting like a deformed mushroom, and informed her that " 'is lordship" was in the Walled Garden. So to the Walled Garden she went, keeping in the shade as she walked along, to escape the blazing sunshine.

It was a favourite haunt of her own—the quaintness of it delighted her artistic soul. It was cheek by jowl with the orchard—over the high, mellow wall that surrounded it hung the delicate frosty icicles of plum and pear, tumbled the rose white cataracts of apple blossom. Against the warm brick of the walls were nailed neat fans of almond blossom and victoria plums. The garden itself was paved—tufts of lavender-flowered thyme and rosemary stuck up in the cracks of the grey mossy stones. The beds round the walls were a sweet, scented tangle of flowers, with even a currant bush, and a plebeian raspberry cane or two among their more aristocratic neighbours. In the very centre of it all was a quaint old sun-dial, raised on a daïs of two steps. Engraved round its mossy dial were two lines from an old poem which pleased Deirdre for their originality and gentle charm—

"Howe coulde suche sweete and wholesome houres
Be reckon'd, but with herbes and flowers!"

In one corner of the walled garden was an odd little thatched summer-house, humped up like a pixy's toad-stool. It was towards this that Deirdre, standing

in the open doorway with one hand on the sun-warmed brick, looked with laughter in her eyes.

As she had expected, Liscarney was sprawling in a wicker chaise-longue, with Sam sitting on his chest, and the red setter flopping in the shade. He had, as usual, a cigarette between his teeth, but what surprised Deirdre was that he was reading. "One of Nat Gould's, I expect," she thought, smiling, as she shut the little green door and crossed the paved court, pausing by the sun-dial to trace out its inscription with the tip of one slim brown finger.

Terence sprang hastily up, with a start which shot the injured Sealyham into space. Deirdre noticed that he had stuffed his book hastily behind the cushions, and was wearing the half guilty, half defiant look of a small boy caught smoking Woodbines in the boot-hole.

She greeted the two dogs, pushed him gently back into the chair, and perched on the arm of it, rumpling his beautifully brushed fair hair with one hand.

"Well, my lord!" she said cheerfully, "what dark crime have you been committing? You look quite ashamed of yourself! Now, Terence Michael Liscarney!"

She slipped a hand behind the cushions, and drew out the book. It was a fat edition of Byron's poems. Terence and Deirdre looked at each other—the former could not have looked more guilty if he had been caught in the act of forging his father's signature.

Then Deirdre spoke, with an odd little quiver in her voice:

"Terence, don't *dare* deny it! You're boring yourself stiff wading through these because I like them!"

He avoided her eyes.

"Oh well, I remembered you spouted a lot of 'em in Venice, and it dawned upon me that it must be jolly boring living with a chap who doesn't even know if Byron wrote the *Canterbury Tales* or 'Here you are then!' So seeing this mouldy old—seeing this book in the library, I thought I'd cart it along with me and have a stab at it, so that next time I'll know something about the old boy——"

Terry was surprised and gratified when long young arms went round his neck, a soft cheek was pressed to his, and Deirdre said in a queer choked voice:

"Terry, you darling! I've told you dozens of times, and I tell you again, that you're much, much too good for me—— Fancy boring yourself stiff, poor boy, just because——"

"Oh rot!" said Terence awkwardly. "I was just enjoying myself when you came along. It's not half bad in bits—Listen to this:

> "'She walks in beauty like the night
> Of cloudless climes and starry skies—'

"Now, I'm not much of a one for poetry, but I think that sounds ripping——"

Deirdre kissed him.

"You Peter Pan—will you ever grow up?"

"Not for some time, I hope! But, I say, Deirdre, why was old Byron such a gloomy bird? The last

one gave me the pip,—I had to wipe my eyes on Sam's whiskers—Listen:

"'When we two parted
In silence and tears
Half broken-hearted,
To sever for years,
Pale grew thy cheeks and cold,
Colder thy kiss:
Truly that hour foretold
Sorrow for this!'"

He read it with a comical air of melancholy and a deplorable lack of expression and punctuation, but Deirdre listened with a very tender expression in her eyes.

"Have you read anything else in this private literary course of yours?' she asked when he had finished.

"Well, I remembered you saying how fine Dante was, so I took the old fellow up to bed with me the night before last, and tried to have a shot at him, but I—er—I didn't get very far. Not, mind you, that he isn't awfully fine and all that—it's that I haven't got the ability to grasp the fineness!"

Deirdre said softly:

"Much as I love you for doing it, darling, yet I should be pleased if you wouldn't bore yourself any more with my silly old Dante and Byron——"

"But it's good for me—honestly, Deirdre! I mean to say, it 'exercises my brain,' as m'tutor used to say! By Jove! I like you in that white thing, Littlest!"

He put an arm around her a little awkwardly—he was always a little awkward with Deirdre—there was something so fine and delicately remote about her that he feared to touch her, in case, like a fragile piece of spun glass, she should shatter to bits under his clumsy fingers. He loved that remoteness of hers—that little air of giving all, and yet holding aloof something—some intangible mystery, some shady green pleasance in her soul.

Generally she was a little undemonstrative—to-day however, she came close to him, and played with the brown hand she held, flattening out the fingers with the tips of her own rosy ones, telling the tragic saga of the Little Pig who stayed at home on them, pressing the palm to her cheek. Then she said suddenly:

"I wish the others weren't coming to-day, Terry! I wish we could be by ourselves——"

It was exactly what Terence wished, and he could not restrain in the look of rapture that stole over his face at her words.

"Do you, Deirdre—do you honestly?"

"Yes—I don't know why, but I do. Does it sound very inhospitable of me? But we're so happy now—"

"Yes, we're happy all right, by Jove!"

He sighed long and rapturously, and captured the small, tanned, fluttering hand in his own. The Sealyham was walking round the sun-dial with an erect stern and lifted nose. Then he padded back, made a dart at the recumbent setter's long tail, sniffed contemptuously at the volume of Byron, which lay on the floor, and then got up on the chaise-longue again,

flopping with a grunt on top of Terence's long legs. Outside in the sunshine two white butterflies began their aimless fluttering ballet, chasing each other over the court. A shaft of sunshine struck on a tangle of tawny orange wallflowers under the shelter of the wall.

Deirdre pointed to them.

"Hobbs calls these 'Gillystocks'—pretty, isn't it?"

"It's what the villagers call them round here. I like the name better myself than 'Wallflowers.' Hobbs is an ardent admirer of yours, Deirdre——"

"I return the compliment!"

Terence shifted his legs to the great annoyance of Mr. Weller, who found himself sliding off.

"They all love you, Deirdre—Hobbs, Jenkins, from the kid at the lodge to Littlejohn, the High Priest of the Pantry! It's extraordinary how you bowl them over—a sort of gift, I suppose." He lit another de Reszke cigarette and leant back, watching the smoke curling away through half-shut blue eyes. "Now, it's a gift that my mother hasn't got. She and the servants never get on. Yet she is supposed to be a very charming woman—funny, isn't it?" Deirdre, thinking of the hard, expressionless eyes, thought that it wasn't, but she did not say so. "She is so fond of you, Deirdre. It's a blessing you took to each other, for I mean to say, it would have been the deuce if you hadn't!" He chuckled softly, little wrinkles puckering up the corners of his mouth and half-shut eyes.

Deirdre, feeling a dreadful hypocrite, laughed too. Yet she had a conviction that, as surely as she disliked her, the Dowager returned her dislike. When the

two were together, they were always watching each other, covertly, like two wild beasts on the defensive. This, however, Terence did not see, and she was glad of it.

Then Terence said lazily:

"What time do they arrive?"

"Guy's train gets in at 3.20—the car's gone to meet him now—Dahlia and Gervase get here a little later—5.15, I believe. They've been staying at Spindlewood, you know."

"Oh, then old Westcote has buried the hatchet with Gervase?" "I knew he would—not alone because of Gervase's success, but Dahlia is his favourite—and —well, Porzie settled the question once and for all."

"A ripping kid, that Porzie——"

"Yes——"

Again a little silence. The setter snapped at a droning bumble-bee that had disturbed his siesta.

Deirdre sat with one arm round Terence's shoulders, the other hand in his, her cheek resting lightly on his hair. It was very hot. Outside the two white butterflies fluttered out from the tangle of cherry blossom hanging over the wall into the sunshine. Deirdre watching them, said slowly:

"Terry, you've never regretted the bargain you made?"

"Bargain—what do you mean?"

"Our marriage——"

Just for a moment his pleasant face looked distressed. He twisted his head and looked up at her with troubled blue eyes.

"Deirdre, I wish you wouldn't say things like that!"

"Like what?'

"Calling our—our marriage a bargain——"

"Well, it was, wasn't it?"

"I don't know—it seems"—he flushed a little like a schoolboy—"like—like profaning something sacred. You know what I mean."

Deirdre laughed a little very tenderly.

"Darling, that shows you *haven't* regretted it! But, after all, marriage is a bargain, if you come to think of it. Some people expect to get too much for their share—others don't keep to the rules of the game—they cheat. Terence, I've tried to play fair with you——"

"If you mean that you've made me happy, you certainly have."

"Honestly, Terry—honestly and truly?"

"Honestly and truly!"

"And you haven't regretted it since?"

Again his nice eyes looked distressed.

"Deirdre, I wish you wouldn't——"

She rumpled the tawny hair.

"Very well, you old darling, I won't. But it makes *me* happy to think that I've made *you* happy! I like you to be happy, Terry, and I think white flannels suit you rippingly, and I love you very much for being such a darling to me, and——"

Terence kissed her.

And it was so that Guy Wyndham, entering the Walled Garden, found them.

Neither of them noticed the tall figure standing in the arched doorway in the high red wall. He stood

for a second watching them with perfectly inscrutable dark eyes. In that second he noticed with extraordinary minuteness a lot of little things—the warmth of the sun on his bare head, the deep, hot fragrance of the gillystocks, a thrush from the orchard who was accusing someone with shrill, chuckling emphasis.

"Thief! Thief! Thief! Th-thie-e-ef!"

Then the Sealyham cocked an ear and growled, recognized the tall Man god who had taken him on his knees and rubbed his ears, and burst forth with a shrill and effusive welcome. They all saw him: Terence gathered his long person up from the chaise-longue, Deirdre sprang to her feet and came out from the cool shade of the summer-house into the glare of the sunshine.

"Guy!" she said. "Oh, I am so sorry that I wasn't at the house to meet you. Did you have a good journey?"

"Quite decent, thanks," he said, smiling. "The train only stopped ten minutes at each station, which I believe is quite a record, isn't it? Halloa, Terry, old man—how brown you are already! You're looking splendid!"

"I feel it," said Terence, grinning his wide, charming grin. "Sam, get down! He's taken a deuced fancy to you, Jingle!"

They were standing by the sun-dial. Guy bent and slowly read out the blurred inscription:

"'Howe coulde suche sweete and wholesome houres
Be reckon'd, but with herbes and flowers—'"

"I rather like that—it's so refreshing after all those——"

"'I mark none but *happy hours*——'

"It always seems to be so smugly complacent, that motto—sort of patting itself on the back for it."

Deirdre's laughter flashed out.

"Exactly what I think! There's another sun-dial in the rose garden, too, but that, thank goodness, has a fairly original inscription——"

"What's that? Don't tell me it's 'Gather ye rose-buds while ye may,' or I shall have to be assisted out of the garden."

"No, it's nothing so trite. It has——

"'Light and shade by turn, but Love alway——'"

Guy suddenly bent his head and picked a sprig of lemon-scented thyme with precise care. When he looked up again his eyes were audacious.

"That has an Ella Wheeler Wilcox flavour, somehow! I prefer the 'Sweet and wholesome hours' one——"

"He's a prosaic fellow, Deirdre," said Terence, shaking his head. "Never can strike even a spark of sentiment from Jingle. You'll have to take him in hand and see if you can't complete his education."

Just for a second their eyes met. It was like a flash of steel meeting steel—a swift thrust, a swifter parry. Then Wyndham bowed sweepingly.

"I shall be honoured," he said, smiling, and put the sprig of thyme in his coat.

Deirdre watched the brown fingers with a curious intentness. She felt that they were both playing a part—playing it, it is true, with extraordinary skill and brilliance, but, nevertheless, feeling that their dialogue was theatrical their laughter forced. It haunted her—that sick feeling of unreality. It was like watching silent shadows play out a piece on the cinema screen—not flesh and blood people, but moving phantoms——

Terence said gaily:

"Shall we go round the gardens? There's plenty of time before tea. Would you like to, Jingle?"

"Rather!"

"Right-oh—I'll just bunk up to the house first, and get a sunshade for Deirdre. A weakness of hers—dashing round in the sun without anything on her head! First time I saw her I had to drop on her for it!"

He made a face at her, and with a "Wait for me here," went at a brisk sprint through the arched doorway and out of sight. The other two followed more slowly, Sam and the setter in bored attendance.

Outside they stopped. They were in the big kitchen garden, a favourite spot of Deirdre's. She liked its quaint charming stiffness—a stiffness which seemed as if purposely arranged to intensify the charm. Afterwards, looking at an old Dutch painting in the National Gallery—a mellow interior, austere yet warm, with the sunlight flooding through the open doorway on to

the peasants' wrinkled faces, the stiff linen of a cap, the dark, polished wood of a cradle one of the women was rocking—Deirdre remembered the kitchen garden at Greyfriars. There was the same fascination about them both—that quaint, deliberate austereness, that sort of stiff charm.

Peaches and nectarines were trained up the walls. There were rows of beans straggling up pyramids of brushwood, asparagus waving its feathery green, beds of modest young strawberry plants, spinach, and the rose-red leaves of beetroots in orderly battalions. A colony of mint and a fat hedgehog-like clump of thyme made the warm air fragrant in the shade of the silver-leaved raspberry canes. A little edging of trim box enclosed all the beds like a neat green ruff, and the borders were gay with tawny wallflowers and little frilly buttons of double daisies.

Deirdre stood with one hand on the warm brick of the wall, as she had stood watching Terence, and lifted her face, snuffing up the drowsy, murmurous scents of the garden like a young war-horse entering the field of battle. Guy stood with his back to the wall watching her. When she turned and met the intent look, a delicate wave of colour ran up under the smooth, faintly tanned skin. She turned away—watching the Sealyham trot up the tiled path to investigate a droning burr that came from the clump of thyme.

Guy leant against the wall, battling with an overwhelming desire to put out his hand and lay a finger on that rose-brown cheek—just to feel its smooth

warmth, the velvety touch of it. The clock in the west turret struck four, very faintly, with a cracked, plaintive note. Everything was very quiet—sleepily quiet. Through an archway they could see one of the gardeners busy among the tomato frames. As he worked he whistled in soft snatches an air from "The Gondoliers"—the thin trickle of sound seemed in no way to disturb the sleepy silence of the afternoon.

Deirdre felt desperately that she ought to say something, yet the drowsy spell of silence held her in its grip. The Sealyham trotted back, sneezing with a comical look of surprise—the thyme had tickled his nose. He flopped on to the warm tiles and made dabs at the tip of Deirdre's white buckskin shoe, his pink tongue lolling.

Then Terence came back, branishing a rose-pink sunshade like a flag—both of them were glad of his return.

"Now, come on," he said, unfurling the parasol over her head. "Let's go through the orchard—we can come out from it into the Water Garden. By Jove, isn't it hot! Just like July——"

They passed through a low arch, festooned with ivy, in the red brick wall that intersected the large kitchen garden, into the orchard. A little path of rough paving-stones had been made through the long aisles of trees. The twisted boughs hung weighed down with their loads of bee-haunted blossom—faintest pink and snow white the orchard lay, like foamy fairy lingerie for an elfin bride. In the long grass the last gay straggles of the daffodils raised their golden

trumpets. A row of white beehives stood in a little clearing, overhung by a tinted torrent of apple blossom.

"Fine year it's going to be for fruit," said Terence, complacently, looking up at the rose-white mosaic of bloom against the blue sky. "Never seen such blossom."

Neither of the others answered, so he rambled on.

"You must have brought us luck, Deirdre. Last year we were in—let's see—we were just back in town from Nice, weren't we? Anyway, Hobbs said that the crop was absolutely a dead failure—the frost got it, and then the blight was 'somethink hawful.' He is very bucked this year. He says it's the Wee Folk who have removed a curse from the house—Hobbs believes very solemnly in the Wee Folk."

"So do I," said Deirdre, "terribly solemnly."

"I know—I believe you *are* one of the Wee Folk—I said so to Hobbs. I informed him that your birthday was on Midsummer Eve and that therefore you were fully qualified to remove all curses."

"What did he say?"

"Oh, he blew his nose, and said awfully solemnly—'Pussonally your ludship, pussonally I shouldn't be surprised. 'Er leddyship, beggin' your parding, 'as heyes o' the Wee Folk's colour, and that may show that *They,*' with a capital, you know—'*they* 'ave taken a fancy like for 'er——' I didn't dare laugh—it would have offended the old boy so. Funny old beggar, Hobbs—quite a family heirloom. My grandfather handed him down to father, and so on—— Come on, we'll cut through this into the Water Garden."

They passed through a tiny wicket gate, along a winding path, and down a flight of wide, shallow steps.

Terry pushed open a high, wrought-iron gate, and they entered the Water Garden. It was a beautiful sunk garden, paved with stones of a queer, greenish colour. A sunk pool was in the middle, covered with the shiny, flat leaves of lilies. Soon the waxen flowers and buds would appear. The brink was massed with clumps of iris—clear, pale yellow and the deeper purple, standing among their tall green blades. In the centre of the pool was a bronze water nymph, poised slim and supple on one foot, with the pipes to her laughing mouth.

Guy sat down on the tiled edge, and looked at the nymph.

"That's rather a decent bronze," he said. "It wasn't here when I came last time——"

"No, we bought it in Rome," said Terence. "Or rather, Deirdre spotted it and dragged me off to inspect it——" He looked at Guy's absorbed face, as he examined the statue. "You and Deirdre are very much the same," he said suddenly. "You both go mad over bronzes and music and sunsets—I'm such a fool that I don't—Deirdre went mad over Venice, and it left me cold. I wish I was like you, Jingle—crazy on beauty. It's a gift, I suppose, that I haven't got."

They both detected the wistful note in his voice.

Guy said hastily:

"Rot, you silly old ass!"

And Deirdre took his arm and squeezed it.

"It's not a gift," she said. "It's a curse. Be thankful you haven't got it, Terry! I put too much value on beauty—I can't live without it. It's like taking drugs, in a way—it becomes a horrible habit ——"

She dropped his arm, her face clouding.

"The irises look lovely to-day——"

"Yes, but it doesn't look really very much until the lilies come, and the forget-me-nots, and those tall blue things—lupins—all along that wall. Then it really is ripping. It——by gad, that dog's going to fall in!"

Even as he spoke, the Sealyham, who had been balancing on the edge watching the goldfish that slipped in and out of the weeds, overbalanced and turned a complete somersault into the water. He came to the surface with a spluttering "Wuff!" and paddled with every appearance of enjoyment, twice round the bronze nymph, at last condescending to be dragged out by Terence. He reminded Deirdre of a child who in play, falls down, and says with a beaming smile—"I *meant* to do that!"

The other two walked slowly to the gate, while Terence followed with the dripping little dog. At the foot of the steps they paused, and looked at each other.

"You have a very beautiful place," said Wyndham slowly.

"Yes——" said Deirdre heavily, "yes——"

She turned and began to mount the steps, walking as if she was tired.

III

Rupert Terence Wycome was playing a little game of his own on the lawn in front of the terrace assisted by Mr. Weller, his faithful adherent. The game consisted of walking with unsteady solemnity for a few yards, and then sitting down with a glorious "Plop!" on the warm grass, clutching at the Sealyham's tail as a handy support. Then you got up and began again. The best moment of the whole thing was when you sat down with the "Plop!"—there was something vaguely soul-stirring about this. But it was all very exciting. Mr. Weller assisted with every sign of loving, if mystified good-will. Sometimes Porzie would not get up at once, but lie rolling on the daisied turf, gurgling hoarsely. This was the time when Sam really shone. He would make dabs at those fat, kicking brown legs, or dart at the waving arms. Porzie received this brilliant piece of work with rapturous shrieks of applause.

Dahlia sat on the terrace above, a novel in her lap —not reading, however, but watching her son play. Occasionally he would turn his round face towards her for applause for an especially shattering "Plop!" Then she would smile and say, in the fond, foolish fashion of past, present, and future mothers— "Splendid, darling! Lovely! Oh, do be careful, Porzie dear!" On which the superior male would throw her a glance of scorn, and rise, divinely and unsteadily, to his feet once more.

Out to the terrace came Deirdre, looking like a

slender boy in her trim grey riding-habit, pulling on her gloves.

"Halloa!" she said. "Sure you won't change your mind and come?"

"No thanks, my dear. I have a new novel here, and am feeling terribly lazy. Besides, Porzie would raise a howl if I departed."

Deirdre rested a hand on the stone balustrade, and looked out at the small blue-overalled figure rolling over on the grass.

"Bless him, how he enjoys himself! He's going to keep that red hair of his, Dahlia!"

"Heaven forbid!"

"Oh, but why? I think it's lovely with dark eyes!"

"Not on a man—the poor child will get his life teased out at school!"

"Well, it's a long time off yet, anyway! And it's too dark red to be called 'Carrots,' if that's any consolation."

Dahlia stuck a cigarette into a long, slim jade holder, and lit it, watching Deirdre lazily through half-shut eyes.

"Can't you find a more energetic person than me to go with you, darling?"

"Terry and Gervase have gone to play golf, and Howard and Olivia are nowhere to be found. I think they've borrowed the little Wolseley and gone for a trundle round. I hope they won't get killed or arrested, or anything——"

She spoke carelessly, tapping her crop against the

tip of her beautifully cut riding-boots. Dahlia flicked the end of her cigarette before replying.

"And what about the fascinating Jingle? Isn't he on the premises?"

Deirdre dropped her crop and bent to pick it up.

"I really don't know. I think he went for a walk or something by himself."

"You knew Jingle some time ago, didn't you?" asked Dahlia casually, yet watching Deirdre through the lilac haze of her cigarette.

"Yes——" said Deirdre.

It was only one word, quite naturally spoken, yet to Dahlia's quick senses it was a warning—"Thus far and no farther."

"I did too," she said thoughtfully. "I met him at Terry's three or four years ago. Even then he was an extraordinarily handsome boy——" She said with startling suddenness. "Don't you like Jingle, Deirdre?"

Deirdre shot her a quick, sidelong glance.

"Yes, of course! Why?"

"Oh, only because you seem to purposely avoid him all the time. But that's only my fancy, I suppose." She looked at Porzie who, crawling on all fours, was now imitating a tiger with striking success. Mr. Weller, tiring of the sport, was impersonating the Sleeping Beauty in the kindly shade of a cedar tree. "He will be marrying soon, I suppose," said Dahlia.

Deirdre's hand tightened on her riding-crop.

"He's very young," she said with another quick glance at Dahlia.

"Yes—he will be twenty-three in August, I think it is. Still he has a good income of his own—Mrs. Wyndham was well off, you know. And this book of his is going to make a great stir, from what one can gather."

"I am glad—— Dear me, to think that we have two geniuses in the house—Guy and Gervase! I knew that Gervase would make a hit one day, Dahlia!"

Dahlia, noticing this neat turning of the conversation off Wyndham, smiled a little.

"Oh, he happens to be the rage just now! It's mere luck, really, if one catches the public eye or not. His book of caricatures is coming out in the Summer, and there's going to be an exhibition of them at the Griffon Galleries in a fortnight."

Although she spoke casually, she could not keep a ring of pride out of her voice. Deirdre bent and hugged her.

"I am so glad, Dahlia dear! I always predicted Gervase's success! Now I must fly—Jim has just brought Milord round to the door! You are a lazy brute not to come with me, but I forgive you—Cheer-oh!"

Dahlia watched her out of sight and then looked thoughtful.

"I—wonder—" she said slowly, and, still thoughtfully threw away her cigarette and began to read.

Jim, a red-haired youth with a grin and freckles as countless as the stars, had brought Deirdre's horse

round to the front door. Milord was a big, bad-tempered chestnut, with satiny flanks and a nervous, rolling eye.

"'E's very fresh to-day, y'ladyship," said the flaming-headed Jim with a covert "Stan' still, y'divil!" as Deirdre came round the side of the house.

"All the better!" she said, smiling. "We'll have a fine gallop. Whoa, my beauty! Now then, Jim —let go!"

Jim let go, thankfully, and watched the big horse, after a few nervous prancings, go at a fast pace out of the big court, through the high wrought-iron gate, and out into the wide avenue. Here Deirdre turned him into the turf, and they pounded at a reckless gallop towards the South Lodge. The pace, reckless though it was, was not fast enough to please her. She bent low in her saddle, the wind stinging her face, hearing the springy turf thunder under Milord's hoofs. Yet she had him well in hand, so that when in passing the Dower House she saw the Dowager standing on the steps, she reined him up at once. The big horse stood panting, fretting to be off once more.

"Halloa, mater!" said Deirdre smiling. "I was coming down to see you to-day."

The Dowager, tall and broad-shouldered in an ancient tweed coat and skirt, looked up at her daughter-in-law with a smiling mouth and quite expressionless eyes.

Deirdre's cheeks were flushed, her hair was wind-blown under her felt hat. She sat in her saddle looking down at the Dowager, laughing like a gay boy.

"Riding that vicious brute again? Terry ought not to let you, Swallow!"

Deirdre fondled the "vicious brute's" satin neck.

"Terry spoils me," she said, smiling.

The Dowager's tone was a trifle acid, although she still smiled broadly—the smile that Deirdre mistrusted.

"So it seems! But you must be careful, Swallow—Milord has a vicious temper. But I mustn't keep you—I just want to know if you all will come to dinner with me to-night. I haven't seen dear Gervase yet, or that charming young Wyndham."

"Thanks awfully, mater—we shall love it," said Deirdre untruthfully—there was nothing she dreaded more than a meal eaten under the cold eye of her mother-in-law. "Have you seen Terry to-day? He has gone golfing with Gervase—good-bye—8 o'clock then—Milord won't stand still another second!"

She nodded her head, laughing, touched Milord with her crop lightly, and the big horse plunged forward, settling into a long, raking stride that covered the ground amazingly quickly.

Once out of the Lodge gates, horse and rider trotted along the lane, up Heron Hill, between the woods and the high banks starred with primroses, out on to the open Down—Milord lifted his head and whinnied with excitement—the girl laughed, excited too, with her cheeks glowing, her eyes shining. She felt a little fey that day, perhaps, and she wanted to clear the memory of Dahlia's words out of her brain. Up here the wind was blowing, not roughly and keenly, as it had done that day up on the Ring. This

was a vagrant wind, that romped past them like a hoyden, warm and thyme-scented, that went a little to the head like a rare old wine.

They galloped up to the very crest of the ridge, where she reined him in and sat looking down at the view before her. There was Greyfriars, or what stood for Greyfriars—a tall chimney or two, a grey wall, among the chestnut trees of the large park. And, nestling in the hollow beneath her, was the warm red roof of Gilly's Farm. She could hear the barking of a dog from the yard, and the clanking of pails from the milking shed.

The big horse moved off down the steep little path, picking his sure-footed way with high stepping daintiness over the rough stones.

Instead of going back the same way, they turned to the right over a field, and through a gate. Now to the right of them were the brown furrows of a ploughed field, to the left—Gilly's Wood.

She rode on until they reached a wide track leading into the wood, deeply rutted by cart wheels. Deirdre hesitated, frowning a little. She knew that a little way up the track was the clearing—the natural little hollow by the stream where she had met Guy three years ago. It was bluebell time now, and the slopes would be a-shimmer with blue, and the brook would be chuckling its elfin laughter over the smooth brown stones. Just for sentimental reasons she wanted one look at it—only one little look. She pushed back her glove and looked at her tiny wrist watch—it would make her a little late for tea. Still she hesitated—the sight of the

wood would waken so many longings and memories and vain, poignant regrets. . . .

Then Deirdre hesitated no longer. Her Spartan courage would not give way to anything in the nature of a weakness. "Coward!" she said aloud, her cheeks flaming. She swung herself down, and taking Milord by the bridle, led him up the track. As she had remembered, there was the little path branching off to the clearing. Horse and rider went down it, the soil deadening Milord's hoofs. They came out into the sunshine, into bluebell-lacquered hollow where the silver ribbon of the stream threaded its winding way through the green lace of ferns.

And, standing with his back against the old beech tree, his dark eyes watching her, was Guy Wyndham.

They stood perfectly still, looking at each other. It struck Deirdre that he had stood like that the last time she had met him here, and she had found him standing there again, as if he had waited for her all the years. Across the shimmer of the bluebells they looked at each other. . . .

The years slipped away. It was a girl in a cotton frock who stood there, looking at a tall, dark-headed, dark-eyed boy—Just for a space Deirdre forgot——

"Halloa!" said the Boy, like a child at a party.

"Halloa!" said the Girl, smiling back at him.

The bees were droning among the bluebells—the sunlight filtered like greenish amber through the beech leaves.

"Won't you sit down for a little? Please—just to see you among the bluebells! Milord will be all right."

Obediently she dropped the reins and came over to him. They sat down among the mossy roots of the old tree—Deirdre with her arms clasped round her hunched-up, long legs. They looked at each other very softly, smiling-lipped. Involuntarily his eyes went to her feet, expecting to see the rose-white of her skin, instead of the black patent riding boots.

Then the boy laughed, with back-thrown head, like a glorious young animal revelling in his strength. He looked at her with audacious dark eyes, and laid a quick brown hand over hers. She felt the long supple fingers close on it warmly, closely.

"So I've found you again!" he said gaily. "I knew that I would, Dear, I knew it!"

Again they looked at each other, triumphantly, tenderly. Then the spell broke—the enchanted moment fled. The laughing dark eyes suddenly seemed strained and deadly tired. He dropped her hand, and turned away. Then he said, not looking at her——

"I'm sorry—I—forgot——"

She, too, had forgotten. Memory returned with a sick rush of misery. They sat silent for a few minutes. Milord, in the background, was pulling at the leaves of a trailing bush, the sunlight glistening on his drooping satin-skinned neck. Except for the rustling of his movements, and the soft burring of the bees, everything was very quiet.

Deirdre got up restlessly, a straight, slender, somehow rather pathetic figure. There was a drooping tired look about her—she was like a bird trailing a broken wing, or a child who has been hurt in her play.

Guy rose too, and suddenly he spoke, catching hold of her sleeve.

"Deirdre, why in Heaven didn't you wait for *me?*"

She turned with quivering lips, looking up at him.

"I—I was afraid——"

"Afraid?"

"That you—you wouldn't come back for me. That you'd forget——"

"But didn't you know instinctively that I wouldn't? Didn't you know that nothing in the world would have kept me away from you? Deirdre, you ought to have known——"

Silence again, a heavy little silence. It was broken by the blackbird, calling gaily, gaily, as if there was nothing unhappy or ugly in the world to mar the beauty of the day.

Dear! De-ear! D-d-de-ear!"

The boy lifted his head, smiling a little.

"Listen to him! Do you remember?"

"Yes, I remember——"

Had she ever forgotten?——

"What funny kids we were——"

"Yes——" said Deirdre heavily, wearily.

She leant against the tree, feeling deadly tired. She tried to rally her drooping spirits—courage—are you going to be a coward?—play up, old man!—courage

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"We must go now——" She added with a little touch of rather pathetic dignity, "And Guy, we mustn't think or talk of—of that any more. It's finished now—all finished——"

Oh, well played—well played indeed, sir!————

She stood very erect and looked at him with an unwavering, gloriously gallant smile.

"Shall we go?"

He followed her, leading the big chestnut horse, down the little path out on to the track again. They left Gilly's Wood behind them.

That night at the Dower House, the Dowager's "darling Swallow," in a dress the colour of a pale flame, was startlingly, vividly brilliant. She seemed to bloom like an exotic flower, to shine as if a light was burning within her. Like the swallow she was compared to, she skimmed lightly through the conversation, never touching on serious topics, keeping it all light and gay. After dinner she sat down at the piano and sang airy French trifles that reminded Guy of tinsel balloons floating in a Summer sky.

Terence seemed delighted and a trifle surprised. He followed her with his eyes, that slender vivid thing in the flame-coloured frock. Once he said to Guy, with a rather pathetic pride, watching his wife as she sat in a big arm-chair and teased Gervase Wycome——

"Deirdre's wonderful to-night."

Guy watched her too. She had just said something clever that made Wycome laugh delightedly. Then she turned her head and looked at him, long and steadily, with a smiling mouth.

"Yes," said Guy Wyndham, "very wonderful."

Courage—it would not be for long——

Courage . . .

CHAPTER VIII

THE DIVINE COMEDY

I

NEXT week the Wycomes went back to town and Howard to Oxford. Olivia announced that she was now "finished," and that the convent in Brussels would see her no more.

"After all," she said to her sister, "I've learnt all they can teach me. I can s-s-speak French really well, and all that. Now I intend to take up my m-music seriously."

Deirdre smiled a little—the idea of Olivia taking up anything seriously was as remote as Paradise.

"You'll have to wait and ask Mother first. Perhaps she'll want you to go over to her."

Olivia rolled her fine eyes.

"What! M-me and Her shut up in a little box of a v-v-villa together all day? Not for 'dis chile! If I want fighting I can easily g-go to the m-m-monkey house at the Zoo. It will be more amusing and l-less expensive. No, darling, I shall stay with you"—she smiled ingratiatingly, showing her white, pointed little teeth—"that is, if you'll have me."

Deirdre laughed this time, as Olivia rubbed her

curly head against her arm like an engaging kitten.

"And what if I won't?"

Olivia looked pensive, then brightened.

"I could get a job in the chorus, I expect. It wouldn't be b-bad fun, and I'd be in London. But, darling, I should be awfully useful to you—arranging f-flowers and writing your letters, and exercising the d-d-dogs, and—er—all that sort of thing. Besides, think how nice it will be having m-me—the little S-s-sunbeam in the home!" she added hopefully.

Deirdre looked at the vivid, eager face, and suddenly realized that it would be nice having her. She was gay and absurd and frivolous, and she would take her mind off—other things.

"All right," she said, smiling. "You shall stay, and I'll bring you out, and present you, and marry you off to a duke. Only you must write to Mother—a *nice* letter, mind!"

The "little Sunbeam" nearly strangled her in a warm embrace.

"It shall be one long cringe in six reels!" she promised handsomely.

So the "long cringe" was sent off, Mrs. Bellamy's consent received, and Olivia's conduct for the next three days was of an almost alarming piety.

The day before the Wycomes went Terry sought out Deirdre as she was writing to Mrs. Bellamy in her sitting-room.

After taking a restless turn or two round the room, picking up a Dresden cup and putting it down again, and staring fiercely at a small but exquisite Corot on

the wall, he sat down on the arm of an arm-chair and looked at his wife.

"I say, Deirdre!"

Deirdre pushed back her letter and turned, smiling, her pen still in her hand.

"We're going to stay down here for another month, aren't we?"

"I think so, darling; don't you? It's so lovely now that it seems a pity to go back to town yet. Why?"

"Well you know that Jingle is writing another book —so I thought that perhaps he'd like to stay down here until we go up to town ourselves—— Fine place to write in, and all that. So just now I said something of the sort to him, and what do you think the queer fellow said?"

Deirdre played with her pen—it was a large quill one, dyed a vivid orange. She ran the tip of a finger up its smooth feathers.

"What did he say?"

"Oh, something feeble about having to go back to town on business or something like that! Jingle is very funny lately—have you noticed it? He seems so much—older, somehow."

Deirdre put down her pen and got up. She, too, crossed the room and stood staring at the Corot. It was a tiny, characteristic landscape—a drooping birch tree, standing solitary by a stretch of dim, tranquil water, veiled in early morning mists. As usual the treatment of light and shade was magnificent. The whole thing had an enchanting grace, a fugitive air of Spring.

She stood staring at it with dull, unseeing eyes. Then swiftly came to a decision.

"I think he'll stay if I ask him to," she said simply.

A smile broke through the gloom on Liscarney's face—he had an almost childish faith in his wife.

"By Gad, Deirdre, I wish you'd have a shot at it! It would be topping having old Jingle down here—I don't think he has been feeling very cheery lately—perhaps his mother's death knocked him out. Will you go and tackle him now? He's in the Water Garden with Olivia."

As she passed him, he caught hold of her hand and kissed it. Deirdre felt a little pang of shame as she looked down at the bent fair head. . . .

Guy was sitting on the raised stone rim of the pool. He had a book in his hand—Olivia was nowhere to be seen. Only Mr. Weller was sitting beside him, watching the goldfish with rapt attention.

Deirdre came down the steps slowly and crossed the paved court with rather reluctant steps. She stood with one knee on the parapet, looking at the bronze water-nymph. Then she turned, and said suddenly:

"Guy, why are you going?"

He was startled by the question—plainly startled. Just for a second something flamed up in the dark eyes, as if a curtain had been raised from a window. Then, just as suddenly, it was dropped. His eyes were perfectly inscrutable again, and warily watched her.

"I thought of going abroad again," he said formally.

"Abroad?"

"To my villa in Venice——"

Venice—it would be Spring there now. She had a sudden vision of grey walls embroidered with drooping wistaria, of violets in the gardens of the Medicis, of the pale rose marble of the Doge's palace reflected in the waters of the canal. Quite suddenly she thought of the Corot in her room. That was Spring too—Spring Incarnate—Spring in Venice—— And she would be alone. Then she looked at him sideways, under her lashes, saw the set strangeness of his face. Terry was right—he looked older, much older. Quite different from the ardent-eyed, smooth-faced boy of Gilly's Wood, with his glorious, swift, leaping Youth.

A wave of tenderness swept her, and with it a sudden consciousness of her own power. As before, when she had stood looking at herself in the misty white and silver cloud of her coming-out dress, it thrilled and intoxicated her. Her long lashes hid her eyes, veiling the exultation in them.

The bronze nymph stood poised in the sunlight, her flesh glistening with greenish-gold tints. A dragon-fly, a gorgeous, slim, glistening thing, skimmed its fragile wings over the still water.

Deirdre rose to her feet. She stood looking down at him.

"Guy, don't go," she said. "I don't want you to go."

He had sprung up too. They stood silent, staring at each other. In an odd, inconsequent way she remembered her dream. It had been just like this—they had stood looking at each other thus, silently, intently.

Then he took a sudden step forward and stopped. She saw him square his shoulders and throw back his head in the old triumphant, exulting way. He laughed, an audacious, reckless laugh that made Memory stir in her. Just so had the boy in Gilly's Wood laughed, standing there with back-thrown head and eager eyes.

"You will stay then?"

"Yes," said Guy Wyndham, "I will stay."

Now that the victory was gained Deirdre felt shaken and tired. She sat down again a little limply, winding the long string of amber she wore round her fingers. The beads slipped through her hands coolly, like smooth drops of sunlit water. She looked at the book lying on the parapet beside her.

"What are you reading?"

Guy pushed it towards her.

"It's for you—my copies came this morning——"

On the dark blue cover she read in neat orange lettering—"Search"—"Guy Wyndham."

A little touch of pride thrilled through her. This was *his* book—the first child of his brain. She picked it up with reverent hands. On the fly-leaf was written in a firm, characteristically careless hand:—

"Lady Liscarney—with the compliments of the Author.

"Guy Wyndham."

Deirdre re-read it several times. Then she said quietly:

"Why did you put that? It sounds so stiff——"

He did not answer, so she said quite simply:

"We are friends, aren't we, Guy?"

With great care and neatness she tore the fly-leaf out, tearing it up into small bits. Then she looked at him smiling.

"I haven't spoilt it a bit. "Now, have you got a fountain-pen? Well, take it and write"—she hesitated a second—"write 'Deirdre—from Guy.' "

Without a word he took the book and wrote across the page what she asked, putting it down in the sunshine to dry.

Deirdre picked it up, and read it aloud with almost childish pleasure——

" 'Deirdre—from Guy——' "

She held the book in her arms as one holds a child.

"Thank you, Guy—thank you very, very much—I shall always keep it, and value it."

The sight of her sitting there with his book in her arms moved the boy to a sudden intense longing. To cloak it he said carelessly:

"They are reviewing it well."

"Yes—I saw a very good review in *The Times* today. I shall go and find a nice quiet place and sit down and read it. It is so exciting to think that you wrote it, Guy!"

She looked again at the slender bronze nymph, with her dancing feet and curving mouth. The sun was very hot—she felt it on her bare arms and uncovered head.

"Where's Olivia?" she asked, turning.

"She deserted me to go and play 'Ogres' with Por-

zie! She's a sport, your little sister, Deirdre. Somehow she reminds me of a boy—there are not many girls who keep so well to the Rules of the Game.

Deirdre looked at him quickly.

"We all do," she said a little haughtily. "It was a rule in the Family to play fair. We don't cheat."

"Ah, but there's something so sporting about Livvy. She's as straight as a die, and she looks at you straight. A fine kid, Deirdre——"

"A darling," she said proudly. "In a way the best of us all. But we all have our bad streaks. Olivia's is her temper. Howard is a darling, but abominably lazy—Roly has the sweetest temper of the lot of us, really—you would love Roly. I wish he could have come to us for his holidays. And my bad streak is——"

"Yes?" he asked, smiling.

"Love of Beauty! As I told Terry, it's a curse when it's abnormal like it is with me. To escape into the World to see all the beauty I wanted was the dream of my life——" She paused, and looked out over the sunny garden.

Guy said very gently:

"And it came true, did it not?"

"Yes," she said slowly. "It came true."

On the silence fell the clang of the tall iron gate.

Dahlia, in a jade-green frock that looked a mere brilliant wisp, short-sleeved, short-skirted, was crossing the court, arm-in-arm with Terence. Olivia was following rather breathlessly with her arms full of the blue-overalled, squirming, fat bundle that was Rupert

Terence Wycome. The Sealyham greeted them all with flattering excitement.

"Halloa!" said Terence cheerfully. "We're going to have a foursome at tennis. Are you going to play you two? I feel in great form, so you'd better prepare to put up some really hot stuff, Jingle my lad!"

Deirdre felt a rush of relief at the sound of his gay voice, and the sight of his tall, big figure in its white flannels and blazer. She had been so perilously close to giving away more than she meant to. She sprang up and took her husband's arm.

"We should love to—at least, I should. Wait a minute until I go up to the house and change my shoes."

She moved off with Terence, Wyndham and Dahlia followed in the rear. Olivia had put Master Porzie down, and was chasing that sturdy infant round the pool, followed with great excitement by Mr. Weller.

"Well!" said Terence as they went up the steps, "did you ask him, Deirdre? What did he say?"

"He's going to stay all right—I knew he would. It only required a little tact!"

Terence squeezed her hand.

"Tact! You must have used a charm or something! I tell you that fellow was as stubborn as an ox when I asked him, and you came along, and—he knuckled under!"

"But I'm a witch, my dear! I say 'Go!' and he goeth, and 'Come!' and he cometh! A little knack, that's all!"

"Little knack or not, I'm jolly glad Jingle is stay-

ing. He's a fine chap, Deirdre—a splendid fellow. At Winchester and the 'Varsity he had a sort of little clique of his own—all the brilliant men of the year were in it. I always said he'd do something one day."

"And he's done it! Look!" She held up *Search* —"He just gave it to me."

"By Gad, is that his book? I suppose I must read it—it looks awfully bulky. But I mean to say, I should drop the deuce of a brick if I pretended to read it, and said to him one day—'I think your book's rippin',' don't you know, and 'I'm so bucked that it ends happily,' and all that, and it turned out to end as dismally as a funeral! Beastly awkward if that happened——"

Deirdre laughed.

"Well, I'm going to read it first, so I can prime you as to the plot. Let's go in and get our racquets. How shall we play? Shall you and I take on Dahlia and Guy?"

"Rippin' arrangement. Come on, old girl, we'll whack 'em hollow."

They sallied forth to the field of battle. . . .

That night, sitting at the window of her bedroom, Deirdre read *Search.* At her elbow a little rose-shaded reading lamp looked like a glowing flower. Deirdre was curled up in a big chair, wrapped in her heavy black-and-gold kimono. Her hair lay over her shoulders in two thick plaits. The window was open, and warm air, fragrant with garden scents, blew in. Underneath her window was a large bed of tall white

lilies, gleaming like slim, pallid tapers through the mauve and silver gauze of the deepening dusk. Their perfume, heavy and sweet, drifted up to her—ever afterwards she associated the scent of lilies with *Search.*

It was a clever, even a brilliant book—clever in a careless, slap-dash way, as if it had been written in a "Take it or leave it" frame of mind. The range it covered was a little staggering, from prehistoric times to the unexpected finale, staged in the twentieth century. Yet in its very audacity of conception and treatment it was brilliant. And in every word it was Guy speaking.

Deirdre realized this as she read on and on. She would have recognized his style out of a thousand books. He had a genius for description—a certain flair for finding the right words, the exact simile. As a painter masses his colours to get the best effect, so he massed his words. Deirdre read on, gripping and breathless, too the very last chapter of all, where the Man finds his Woman at last, in a Wood—a beech wood, carpeted in blue-bells—— This scene, exquisitely written, in the simplest language, yet vividly gripping extraordinarily tender, closed the book.

Deirdre read the last words, then sat very still, staring at the printed page in her lap. She realized that Guy had written the whole book, but especially the last chapter, for her, to her. He had written it before he found her again. It was a message, an appeal, a question——

She turned to the title-page again—here was the

poem that formed the motif of the book—Constance Skinner's beautiful "Song of the Search"——

"I descend through the forest alone——"

Deirdre read it through again mechanically——

This was beautiful she thought subconsciously, wonderfully beautiful. And Guy had put it on the front page for *her*.

"Oh Earth, Earth, great Earth,
Mate of God, and Mother of Me,
Say, where is she, the Bearer of Morning,
My Bringer of Song?
Love in me waits to be born—
Where is She, the Woman?"

Outside the sky was pearly with the pallor of the approaching dawn. One by one the stars paled and died. A bird began to sleepily stir in the garden—the heavy, cloying sweetness of the lilies drifted upon the little vagrant dawn wind. Deirdre sat on, in the big high-backed chair, her face between the heavy black ropes of hair, very pale, but strangely tranquil. She sat staring straight in front of her, with inscrutable eyes.

"Love in me waits to be born—
Where is She, the Woman?"

CHAPTER IX

"THE SPLENDOUR AND THE PAIN"

Rupert Brooke

I

"SEARCH" was a success.

It sold remarkably well, and was reviewed brilliantly. Its name was on everyone's tongue—it was discussed, praised, dissected, and advertised all over the country.

Guy Wyndham took his astounding success with the utmost nonchalance. He even seemed a little bored by it. He refused all the invitations that came by every post, and stayed at Greyfriars writing the opening chapters of his new novel.

Olivia celebrated Guy's success by spraining her ankle. She was letting off a little high steam by jumping over a taut tennis net, when she misjudged the height, and caught her foot in the net, falling heavily with her ankle twisted under her. Hobbs, who had been a scandalized witness of the accident, was of the opinion that she had deserved to "break her neck." Despite this gloomy prophecy, the crusty old man daily sent his choicest hot-house fruits and flowers to the invalid, whose tireless energy chafed at being tied to a sofa even for an hour.

Thus Guy and Deirdre were together constantly.

Terence was very busy at the time with the estate, Olivia was put out of action by her sprained ankle, so it naturally resulted that they sought each other's company.

In the weary weeks in which she was confined to her sofa, Olivia made a totally unexpected friend in the Dowager. When the others were out the Dowager would stump up to the house with her solitaire board, or fascinating ivory chess-men, or assortment of bygone literature which Olivia accepted politely, but never read. They would sit together on the terrace, Olivia on her couch playing with the Sealyham, chewing sweets, or amusing herself with the solitaire board, while the Dowager sat beside her knitting furiously, and offering either legends of her youth, or barbed comments on the manner of the present generation. To the former Olivia listened eagerly—to the latter with pitying amusement. Of course, anyone who condemned short skirts, and deplored cocktails and jazz, had, to put it mildly, "a top story to let, unfurnished." But on the other hand, stories of the unbelievable time when girls wore crinolines, knew how to blush, and called their fathers "Sir," were intriguing—nay, fascinating.

Later on she said to Deirdre, after the Dowager had stumped homewards:

"'The Hyena'—(A sobriquet earned by Olivia's summing up that 'she was the sort of p-person who laughs very loudly, and then b-b-bites you in the calf when you t-turn your back!') isn't such a bad old crow when you know her p-p-properly."

"Of course she isn't," said Deirdre hastily, and trying without success to look reproving.

"Although she has a tile loose somewhere," continued the disrespectful daughter of Eve pensively. "But what can you expect when she used to faint if a man squeezed her hand, and do heaps of c-crewel work, and cart round j-j-jelly and soup to watery-eyed old men, and m-moustached women in the parish? You know, sort of m-m-ministering-angel stunt. I expect she'd have killed off T-terry's father, if his horse hadn't kindly d-d-done it for her——"

"Livvy dear, you mustn't say these things!" said Deirdre, feeling a dreadful hypocrite.

Olivia darted her a shrewd glance.

"Well, if you take your Auntie L-Livvy's advice, darling, you'll keep an eye on the Hyena. You may not know it, but she hates you like s-smoke!"

Deirdre, who knew this to be perfectly true, was silent.

"She's watching you," said Olivia, "waiting to t-trip you up. And, my aunt, wouldn't she enjoy doing it if she got the ch-ch-chance! So keep that in mind honey, and—watch your step!"

There was something so warning in the last words that Deirdre glanced hastily round, but Olivia was lying back on her sofa, entirely absorbed in studying a full length photo of Miss Mary Pickford in the *Tatler*.

That night they sat out on the terrace after dinner, and Deirdre sang for them, her voice floating out through the open French windows of the drawing-

room on the still air. She sang "Pale hands I loved beside the Shalimar," and "The Nightingales of Lincoln's Inn," and then one of Newbolt's short poems that Olivia had fitted in with a haunting little tune which had sung in her head for days. Both the words and the simple melody were charming.

"Though I wander far-off ways,
Dearest, never doubt thou me:
Mine is not the love that strays,
Though I wander far-off ways:
Faithfully for all my days
I have vowed myself to thee:
Though I wander far-off ways,
Dearest, never doubt thou me——"

Outside on the terrace everything was still and scented. A languid crystal pale moon was riding high in the purple softness of the night sky. The mingled scents of lilac and lilies, the heavy sweetness of stocks, mingled with the twilight.

Olivia was lying in a long chair, her dress and face gleaming wanly through the dusk. Wyndham was seated on the wide stone balustrade of the terrace looking out into the dim garden, the end of his cigarette glowing like a jewel. Terence, on the arm of Olivia's chair, had Sam, the Sealyham, in his arms, and one of the fox terriers sitting on the flagstones at his feet.

"Though I wander far-off ways,
Dearest, never doubt thou me——"

The soft clear voice died away into silence. Wyndham was glad. He never listened to it without a heartache, a poignant longing.

Deirdre came out on to the terrace. She wore black that night—a long, glittering slender sheath of black, with beautiful, narrow black shoes, pointed, and strapped on the instep, with absurdly high, delicate little scarlet heels.

Oddly enough the black, instead of making her look older, intensified her childish air. She looked like a lovely schoolgirl masquerading in a Paris gown.

Olivia, however, thought otherwise. She was feeling bored, and cross, and she would have staked her soul to be sitting in the stalls at the Gaiety instead of lying on the terrace at Greyfriars.

"I wish you'd sing something cheerful," she remarked crossly. "That thing is as solemn as a f-funeral! Soon you'll be singing that awful thing in the N-National Song Book——"

She sang in a shrill treble:

"'Oh mother, mother, make my b-bed,
For I shall d-d-die to-morrow!'"

Deirdre said, with imperturbable good humour:

"Well, you wrote the setting of that rondel yourself."

"I wish I'd b-burnt it," said the composer savagely. "It's the gloomiest thing! And I wish you wouldn't wear black! I hate you in it!"

"Shall I run up and change it, darling?" enquired her sister sweetly, swinging a slender foot.

"Don't be a f-fool! Oh, Lord, how d-dull you all are! I'm *bored!*"

And the invalid turned her face to the cushions and groaned.

"You're tired too, Baby," said Terence, rumpling the thick curls. "Shall I carry you up to bed?"

"No, you *won't,* my lad!" exploded his sister-in-law with sudden energy. "*Bed,* indeed! Tell you what, though, you can carry me indoors, and s-sing me your one song, and strum on the p-p-piano. Anyway, it will be cheerful!"

Terence, whose repertoire consisted of "Coal Black Mammy," and "Helen," obediently threw away his cigarette, arose, and lifted Olivia from her long chair.

"Shan't be long!" he said, grinning. "Must humour the che-ild, I suppose! Take Jingle to see the gardens by moonlight, Deirdre—they ought to look stunning. I'll join you in a few ticks."

They watched the tall figure cross the terrace, pass through the French windows, from the gloom into the light. The rosy lamplight glinted on his fair head for a minute, then he was gone. Then they turned and looked at each other.

Deirdre slid to her feet with a little, half-nervous laugh.

"Are you coming?" she asked, looking over her shoulder.

He followed her down the wide, shallow steps. They walked down a long turf path, bordered with beds of flowers. The tall lilies looked wan and ghostly through the dusk, tangles of Mrs. Sinkin's pink and

ox-eyed daisies seemed like fragrant patches of moonlight, clumps of iris and blowsy pink peonies lost their colour, and became mere shadowy wraiths of blossom. The moon had veiled her polished shoulder in amethyst mists—now and again her fair pallor shone out, broken by the grey and silver gauze of scudding clouds.

They turned down a long, narrow alley of clipped yew. The tall, thick ramparts of dark foliage blocked all but a strip of mauve sky, gemmed with the pale eyes of stars, like the markings of some wonderful peacock's tail. Underneath their feet was close-cropped turf, spangled with daisies, tiny paillettes sewn on a velvet robe. The dew-wet grass deadened all footfalls—there was something a little unearthly in walking like this through the warm darkness, noiselessly speaking no word. Deirdre felt the need of speech —something trite and commonplace to ward away the intoxicating glamour of the night.

"Shall we go and see the Walled Garden?" she asked lightly. "I love it by moonlight."

"I'll take your word for it!" said Wyndham laughing.

He, too, had felt the spell closing in on him, and was glad of words and laughter.

They went down some more steps, through an archway in the wall, and into the kitchen garden. A white moth fluttered out of the hedge, and brushed against Deirdre's face. Bats, uttering their thin, squeaky cry, swooped low—Mr. Weller, who had padded silently in the Beloved's wake, made a vicious snap at them.

Deirdre could smell the wallflowers in the borders, and the faint fragrance of the currant leaves.

They had come to the little green door in the wall, —Guy held it open and she passed down the steps into the Walled Garden. The flagstones lay all dappled with the fleeting mosaic of moonlight. In its corner the little thatched summer-house was humped up like a twisted, malignant dwarf. Beyond the high walls the mist of the orchard looked fairy-like, elusive. The pale light made the rose-flushed foam of the apple blossom into a snowy cataract of sweetness, brushed with lilac shadows. The whole place had taken on a disturbing witchery, an intangible glamour, that in its robes of sunlight it discarded.

Deirdre walked slowly over to the sun-dial and stood with one hand on the cold stone, her head slightly bent. She had the silvery Spanish shawl lightly over her shoulders—the moonlight had robbed it of its vivid lacquer greens and burnt oranges and mandarin blues. She was a study in black and white as she stood there—the glistening black of her dress, the pearly white of her arms and neck. Her face, too, looked jasmine pale between its heavy waves of black hair—even the clear green of her eyes had deepened —they seemed dark and wide and full of witchery.

The boy crossed over to her, and stood looking down at the hand on the sun-dial. It was a beautiful hand—narrow, with long, slender, pink-tipped fingers. It seemed to him that as long as he fixed his mind on something, his control would not snap. Intently he stared at that white hand. Deirdre searched wildly

for some topic of conversation. She felt that if they did not do something—talk of commonplace things, laugh, and joke—that the glamour of the night would crash down their defences, break over their heads like a vast, breathless wave, and bring them face to face with the inevitable end. It would carry them along on its crest and then—all would be over. Desperately she rallied her forces to meet its assault.

"How are you getting along with your book?" she asked, turning to him.

"Quite well, thanks," he said politely and tritely. "I hope to get it finished very soon."

"I am longing to read it, Guy! Do you know that I always was perfectly sure that you were going to make good?"

"That was very charming of you," said the boy, feeling as if he was acting a part on the stage.

It all was so unreal—the dim garden, the girl in her black gown, their nearness.

" 'There was a horse in the King's stables and its name was Genius.' " quoted Deirdre smilingly. "You've mastered that horse, Guy, that so many aspire to ride! I only wish that I could join you!"

He said abruptly:

"You have a finer horse than mine to ride. Your horse's name is—Beauty——"

Deirdre made a little wincing gesture.

"Ah, don't say that! Beauty has been the curse of my life! The desire for it, the craving for it! If it hadn't been for Beauty I should have waited for you——"

She stopped short, her fingers twisting together in a pathetic way. The scents of the garden filled the warm air—thyme and rosemary, stocks and lilies. Strong above it all, the poignant perfume of dew-wet lilac. She turned away and walked restlessly over the court. An overhanging bush of lilac swept her head, showering dew and tiny mauve trumpet-like corollas on her hair. She reached up and caught down a great cluster of blossoms, holding the sweet coolness of it against her flushed cheeks. The overpowering fragrance went to her head like a mellow, rare old wine. She closed her eyes, feeling a half-sensuous intoxication, a throbbing desire. A little phrase, heard or read somewhere, slipped into her head—"the delirious dusk——" The moon had slipped behind the clouds—the Walled Garden was full of dim shadows. The scent of lilac—alluring, sweetly heavy—and the delirious dusk. . . .

The delirious dusk. . . .

Deirdre knew that Guy was watching her. She knew that she had only to turn, and hold out her arms, and that the battle would be over. She did not want to fight any longer—courage was dead in her—all her gallant pretence gone——

The delirious dusk. . . .

Very slowly Deirdre turned. Across the court they looked at each other. Deirdre's heart was beating very fast—her throat felt dry and choking. She heard the clock in the west turret strike the half-hour—one cracked thin note that fell on the silence like a tangible blow. The moon slipped out from the clouds,

soaring high in the pale sky, aloof, remote, coldly beautiful. Its light showed them the longing, the restrained passion in each other's faces. There was a tense, strained silence for a minute, then Guy crossed the court to her side. He did not touch her—only stood looking, looking, as if to read something in her face. Then he said softly:

"Deirdre——"

The overpowering sweetness of that lilac—and the delirious dusk—it was like a subtle fire in her veins. She forgot everyone else in the world. For her there was no world, except the charmed circle in which they stood together. The scent of the lilac seemed to make her a little faint—sweetly languid. The nearness of him—warm and throbbing with glorious, leaping life! . . .

The delirious dusk. . . .

And the spell was broken, shattered like a Venetian glass goblet beneath the stroke of a hammer.

A gay, tuneless voice upraised quite close at hand, in discordant praises to the pale stars—

> "For I'm goin', for I'm goin',
> With a love that's ever growin'
> To that Coal Black Mammee-of-mine!
> Not a cent, not—a—c——"

"Bruce, you scamp, come off that bed of seedlings!"

Terence. . . .

Quite suddenly the languid sweetness that had clouded her brain cleared, and Deirdre felt cool-headed,

and perfectly sane. It was as if a gust of wind from the moors had blown away the scent of the lilacs from her senses. She remembered sharply and clearly a hundred silly, trivial little things. They flitted through her memory like cinematograph pictures across a screen —— Terry's laugh, boyish and awkward . . . the way he said "Oh rot!" and coloured up all over his face . . . the glint of his fair hair in the sunlight. . . . Terry diving into the lake, and waving a glistening arm. . . . Terry looking down at her with love in his frank eyes . . . the admiring affection and pride with which he talked of "Jingle"——

Jingle, his friend . . .

Terry. . . .

A memory of her own words came to her—"It was a rule in the Family to play fair,—we don't cheat!"

Her pride stung her like a lash—pride, and a great shame. Shame looked at her out of Guy's eyes—he, too, had forgotten all in the wild delirium of the moment.

Deirdre moved away, bracing every muscle and nerve and fibre of her being to greet Terence with a smile. She did not look back at the tall, slender figure by the lilacs, for if she had done, all her control would have broken down. She felt weakened, physically and mentally, exhausted, spent, as a swimmer who, battling among the waves, is dashed on to the shore. That was how she felt, as if many waters had passed over her head——

The door in the wall swung open with a crash, and Terence appeared, followed by the setter.

"Halloa!" he called cheerfully. "I thought I'd find you here! After two renderings of my famous 'turn,' Livvy finally consented to being carried up to bed, and I sent Parker in to undress her, Deirdre. I believe she was dead tired. Well, Jingle, my lad, what d'you think of the Walled Garden by moonlight?"

There was a little pause, and then Guy said casually: "I think it's ripping——"

"It's a gorgeous night, by Gad! Shall we take a turn round by the maze, Deirdre? Hobbs informed me that all the yew was clipped yesterday, and that the new borders looked top-hole——"

Deirdre made a gallant effort—her voice was perfectly steady and natural.

"You two go—like Olivia, I'm fagged to death! It must be all the tennis we played this morning. I'll go to bed, I think. Good night, Guy. Good night, Terry dear——"

The hand she gave to Guy was hot and fevered, but it struck Terry's usually unobservant soul that the lips he kissed were icy cold.

Then she was gone, the Sealyham's warm, furry little body pressed tightly in her arms.

All the way up to the house her face was working pitifully like that of a child who was trying not to cry. But as she entered the drawing-room it changed, as if a mask had been slipped over it. The servants were about—there were Parker's sharp eyes to face. Serenely, but with feet that dragged a little in their high-heeled shoes, she went upstairs, and down the

long gallery. It was dimly lit, and the gilt frames of the portraits gleamed dully. Painted eyes stared down at her, painted lips smirked or pouted as she hurried past. Click, clack, went her little red heels on the polished floor. The light glistened on the dull lustre of the old oak and the suits of armour that stood here and there. Over the mantelpiece on the wide hearth, hung the portrait of Dermot, 9th Earl of Liscarney, smiling down at her with Terry's lips, watching her with Terry's blue eyes. It seemed to her overwrought nerves that the eyes were stern and accusing, the mouth sneering. She hurried past, her Spanish shawl trailing on the floor like the petals of a draggled flower.

Her bedroom was quiet and soothing, waiting like a kind, beautiful friend. The rose-pink curtains were drawn, the tall lamp looked like a rosy, glowing blossom of light. From the big dressing-table came the soft intimate glisten of tortoise-shell and gold. A black *crêpe de Chine* nightdress was laid out on the bed, with its pile of snowy pillows and rose satin canopy. The room smelt pleasantly and faintly of Morny's Mysterieuse bath salts. Parker, a black, discreet shadow, was moving deftly and silently in the background.

Deirdre put Sam down on a low couch, and herself sat down with a delicious sense of physical and mental relaxation. Parker, casting a glance of disapproval at the Sealyham, and one of love at her mistress, knelt down and began drawing off the satin shoes and fine, lace-insertioned stockings.

Afterwards, when she was lying in bed among the frilly pillows, and Parker picked up the Sealyham and prepared to depart, she cried sharply:

"Oh, Parker, leave Sammy with me for to-night! He'll be very good."

The handmaiden pursued her thin lips.

"'E's sure to 'ave fleas, your ladyship," she prophesied darkly.

"He hasn't got *one!*" declared Deirdre indignantly. "Besides, he had a tub this afternoon, so his little paddy paws are lovely and clean—aren't they, precious? Oh, do, Parker!"

When her mistress smiled at her, Parker was as warm wax in her hands. Putting the ecstatic Sealyham down on the bed, with a last gloomy warning she switched off the lights and went out.

Deirdre put out an arm and cuddled the little warm body.

"Now you'll be a good boy and go to sleep, won't you, Samiwell darling! There—here's a lovely little hollow for you to curl up in. Good night, little man."

The Sealyham, staggered but overjoyed by this largesse of the gods licked her hand with his rough pink tongue, and then curled up on the coverlet, settling down with a grunt of rapture. This was better than a basket any day, he reflected drowsily—usually the bed was a forbidden Paradise, except in the mornings, when Parker lifted him up on to it with the Beloved's tea and letters.

Deirdre lay, her cheek pillowed on her hand like a child, for a long time, staring into the darkness. The

big windows were thrown wide open, and the moonlight came flooding through, lying in a cold pool of pearly light on the polished floor. It seemed to her a very long time before she heard Terry's step outside and he came in, trying to walk very softly. He did not switch on the light, but she could see his tall figure in the twilight, and the glint of his fair hair. Deirdre shut her eyes—she shrank from talking that night. Through her lashes she saw him tip-toe across the room, and repress the little white dog's welcome with a warning whisper. He bent over her, listening to her quiet breathing, and very gently drew the clothes up over a bare, outflung arm, like a mother with her child. Deirdre felt something hot and stinging well up under her lashes, blinding her vision. Then he tip-toed very quietly away into his own room, walking with the lightness peculiar to big men. . . .

Deirdre Liscarney turned her face to her pillows—her mouth was all twisted, and quivering like a hurt child's.

II

For the next few days Olivia's sharp eyes noticed that her sister and Guy seemed purposely to avoid each other. Deirdre was with Terence a lot, and she would look at him rather pathetically sometimes, as if trying to draw courage from the sight of him.

Then came a May afternoon, all blue and white and gold, with a little wind ruffling the fleecy clouds, and making the trees curtsey low, as if they were court

ladies, powdered and crinolined, sinking into a graceful reverence, with a prodigious rustle of silks and laces, at the approach of King Summer.

Olivia, lying on her sofa in a corner of the terrace, was languidly looking over a pile of journals and giving racy comments on life in general. The Dowager was knitting a hideous jumper, looking very square and large in her wicker chair. Through her pale lashes she watched Deirdre, who was perched on the stone balustrade, idly swinging a narrow, whiteshod foot, and watching Hobbs mowing the lawn below. The droning whir of the machine seemed to blend in pleasantly with the golden drowsiness of the afternoon.

Guy Wyndham, tennis racquet in hand, was drumming on the strings with one brown hand, moodily staring out into the garden. The Dowager looked at him with dislike. She was annoyed with him for being so tall and slender and well-knit in his white flannels and college blazer, for having a good profile and dark eyes that looked at her mockingly. Vaguely she disliked and mistrusted him—warily she looked from him to Deirdre through her pale lashes, while seemingly busy with her knitting.

Olivia flung down the *Sketch,* and yawned widely. "Where is our estimable Terence?" she asked.

Deirdre said, tracing a pattern on the cold stone with the tip of a slim finger:

"Gone to a meeting at the Town Hall, poor dear—something feeble about agriculture, I think. It seems a shame on a glorious afternoon like this."

The Dowager finished a row, and spread the jumper

out on her knee, smoothing the wool down with short, stumpy fingers.

"The dear boy is very enthusiastic," she said primly, "He really takes a pride in the estate, and the tenants' comfort."

Olivia shot an impish glance at her, and rumpled her dark curls till they stood on end.

"Still, the Town Hall is a mouldy hole to spend a topping afternoon in. It's like the family vault with electric light l-l-laid on, and a p-policeman who glares at you when you go in——"

She picked up the *Sketch* again, and looked critically at a photo of Ivor Novello, tracing out his profile with a sugared almond. After putting the sweet into her mouth and cracking it with her small, sharp teeth, she thoughtfully studied the back of Guy's dark head.

"What are you two going to do?" she enquired. "P-play tennis?"

Guy turned round and smiled at her.

"We've had one sett already——"

The Dowager looked at him sourly. Olivia intercepted the glance, and thought shrewdly:

"The Hyena has got her claws into p-p-poor old Jingle! I wonder why?" Aloud she said, crunching the sugared almond like a squirrel:

"Why not go for a ride?"

This time the excuse came glibly from Deirdre:

"Too much fag changing, Baby——"

Olivia saw the Dowager flicker a pale, lightning glance at her daughter-in-law.

"Darn the old fool!" she said inwardly. "She's

always watching Deirdre—watching her to catch her out!" She fished for another almond, licked its smooth coating of pink sugar with a pensive tongue, and then said hopefully: "Why don't you take Jingle to have a l-look at the lake, Deirdre? It ought to be ripping there t-t-to-day——"

Deirdre hesitated. She could think of no decent excuse, and to refuse would look strange. She felt the Dowager's eyes on her, and there was a challenge in their cold depths. Hastily, proudly, she snatched it up.

"All right—would you like to come, Guy? We can go in the canoe if you like—— Good-bye, Mater—cheer-oh, Liv!"

Two pairs of eyes watched them go down the steps and over the lawn—Guy, tall and very Italian looking in his flannels, Deirdre, walking with her peculiar swaying grace, the skirt of her pale green dress swinging above her ankles.

Then the Dowager said thoughtfully, her needles clicking at a terrific rate:

"They are great friends, are they not?"

Olivia looked at her through narrowed eyes, smiling a little.

"Yes," she said curtly.

There was a little silence, then:

"They met years ago, didn't they?" asked the Dowager casually.

"Yes." said Olivia again, picking up *Nash's Magazine.*

The Dowager pursued her point with the stolid heaviness of a tank going into action.

"At your home?"

Olivia, who knew nothing about their meeting, and had never asked, thought rapidly:

"Darn the woman! If I say I don't know she'll begin to suspect something fishy!"

She flicked the leaves of her magazine, and said lightly:

"At a d-dance, I believe. Why?"

With the war in her own country, the Dowager hastily ceased fire, but only for a minute.

"He is a very handsome young man," she said acidly.

Olivia agreed sweetly.

"Very, isn't he? He reminds me of that statue of the Winged M-m-mercury, somehow. Doesn't he you?"

The Dowager, who thought that all statues of gods and goddesses were slightly unpleasant and vaguely immoral, nodded her head. There was something satisfying in finding an immoral streak in Guy Wyndham.

III

As they walked silently over the springy turf of the park, Deirdre thought of Terence. She thought of him desperately, intently, as a knight going into battle thinks of his lady. She thought of the way he smiled, of his dearness to her, his gay voice.

It must not be thought that Terence was a paragon of all virtues. In over two years of married life Deirdre had plumbed all his weaknesses, and loved

him the better for them. In character he was a little weak, following where others led, going through life with a charming, easy-going creed of Hail-fellow-well met. Physically he was splendid—mentally he lacked —what was it that he lacked? Some clear-headed strength of vision—strength of will? Deirdre could not decide. He was perfectly incapable of jealousy—proud of the admiration her beauty excited, proud of the way people turned to look after her in the street, stared in restaurants and theatres. She knew that after his marriage there had never been another woman in the world for him—he had no eyes for anyone else. Her beauty had dulled his senses, swamped him like a flood. This faithfulness vaguely irritated her—it was so absurdly dog-like—yet she knew that there was no cause for irritation. He possessed an unshakable nerve and an iron courage, but yet he shrank from the supernatural. Deirdre knew of his weakness, and marvelled that so splendid an animal as Terence could know the clammy touch of dread. Deirdre could banish it with the touch of her lips, the clasp of her arms. It made him strangely dear to her—awakened all the tenderness of her nature. To balance his faults came his virtues. He was straight as a die, wonderfully gentle to all things weaker than himself, clean all through, and—best of all—he loved her.

So Deirdre thought of him as she walked in the green shade of the chestnuts, thought only of his great love for her, of his splendid, unshakable faith. They spoke no word until they came to the large lake at the west end of the park.

The water lay still and dreaming, seeming hardly to move. The sunshine had gilded its smooth ripples into glittering scales of gold. The thick beech trees that fringed the banks were reflected in the burnished water, throwing long fingers of shadow across its radiance. Deirdre, shaking off her embarrassed silence, said, as they walked through the wood to the boat house:

"Shall we take the little canoe and go over to the island?"

Wyndham nodded, smiling. He, too, seemed to be constrained and awkward.

The little canoe was tied up to the landing-stage, dancing up and down on the ripples.

Guy took off his blazer and threw it in, helped Deirdre in, and followed her, untying the painter. He picked up a paddle, and the little canoe shot forward, the ripples making a gurgling chuckle under its prow.

Deirdre lay back, drifting the ends of her fingers in the clear water, and letting the drops fall like crystal beads from her rosy finger tips. The lilies were out —great waxen cups of sunlight, stained and streaked with rose, or the smaller yellow ones, long stalked and scented, lying like rich, encrusted jewels among their shiny green leaves. Two swans sailed languidly towards them, arching their graceful necks. One reared up, flapping its wings, and uttering its harsh, unlovely cry—a little family of moorhens scurried over the water, and disappeared among the rushes. Deirdre put out a finger and touched a water-lily as they drifted along. Looking up and meeting the smiling

glance of Guy's dark eyes, she smiled back, a blessed sense of relief stealing over her.

A dragonfly, a shimmering flame-blue thing, skimmed its gauzy wings perilously over the water. Deirdre reached up and took off her hat, crushing it down beside her. She ruffled up her black hair, smiling.

"Hats annoy my sense of the fitness of things! In the Park and Bond Street they're all very well, but in the country they're *annoying!* Besides, we weren't meant to wear hats, were we? Did Eve wear a hat, d'you think?"

"I'm sure she did—probably an airy trifle of a fig leaf and a daisy chain, which made Adam swear, when he saw the bill!"

"Oh well, I hate them anyway! It's Terence's mission in life to run after me with one, giving warnings of sunstroke and headaches and freckles!"

A little too deliberate, that bringing of Terence into the conversation. There was silence for a moment, broken only by the lazy murmuring of the water under the nose of the canoe.

"Shall we put in to the island?"

"I don't know—yes—no——" Somehow the pretty island with its thick plantation of trees and thatched tea-house, seemed baleful and gloomy. Deirdre felt, looking at it, that same sense of heaviness, of danger, which had weighed her down that night at the Opera. She said quickly: "Not yet, if you don't mind. Shall we have one turn more?"

They drifted on, the little canoe dancing over the

water as lightly as a blown leaf. The high banks round the lake were thickly wooded with beech. Here and there against the thick mossy trunks shone out the silvery slimness of a drooping birch tree, solitary and exquisite as a line of Shelley in a drama, or a few bars of Debussy in one of Beethoven's Sonatas. Quite near them, a fish leapt, leaving widening circles after it. A wood-pigeon from among the trees started to coo, a soft, sobbing, husky sound that fitted in with the drowsiness of the atmosphere.

They went once more round the lake, loitering in the shadows, cleaving the burnished water like a swift arrow. Deirdre sat looking all round her, now and then shooting a swift glance at Guy from beneath her long lashes.

The little breeze had ruffled his hair with mischievous fingers. The heavy silk shirt was open at the throat, and against its whiteness his skin looked very brown. She took an absurd pleasure in looking at him —a thrilling, half guilty pleasure . . . He was so—not handsome, or good-looking—but *beautiful.* That was the only word to use—beautiful, and he was the only man she had ever seen who could qualify for this description without being effeminate. There was no trace of effeminacy in his clean, perfectly balanced grace, in his thin, oddly young face, and long, nervy hands. The Greeks with their adoration of beauty, would have worshipped him. And, happily for himself and others, he was superbly unaware of his good looks, a phenomenon which had caused his mother much thankful rejoicing.

"Now," said Guy, "the island?"

Deirdre nodded, smiling. With a few swift strokes of the paddle the light little craft shot out from the overhanging bank, across the smooth water in which the blue of the sky was drowned, to the little landing-stage of the island.

Guy helped her out, tied up the painter to a ring, and together they strolled up the path to the tea-house. Pine trees were mingled with the beech, and the ground was covered with their silky dark needles. They formed a thick slippery carpet which deadened their footsteps, as if they were walking on velvet.

The little thatched tea-house was in a small clearing —a quaint place built in a sketchy imitation of the Japanese style. Inside was a round green table and a few wicker chairs. The place smelt damply of mildew and decay. Deirdre shivered a little, coming into the musty shadow of the sunshine.

"It's damp, isn't it?" she said. "Let's get out of it —I hate this place."

Once out into the warm air, she heaved a sigh of relief.

Guy said half teasingly, half gently:

"Why, you baby, I believe you're *afraid!*"

She looked up at him quite gravely.

"Do you know I *am*—of that place! Don't you sometimes take violent dislikes to places? For me that little tea-house is—is unfriendly—evil—oh, I can't explain! But I feel that it's unclean, like—like a leper. It makes me *afraid!*"

He did not laugh any more, but very gently took her hand in his warm one.

"You're not afraid now, are you?"

She smiled at him, like a child whose fright has passed.

"Not now—in the sunshine! Shall we walk round the island? Don't the pines smell nice—all warm and clean?"

They started to walk round the tea-house, following the little path. Quite naturally and unconsciously Deirdre had left her hand in his, so they walked with their hands swinging, like two children. It was only when they reached the clearing in the centre of the island that Deirdre remembered, and slipped her fingers out of his, the colour running up under her skin in a warm flood.

To cloak her confusion, she sat down on a mossy stump, crossing her legs in a school-boyish way. He remained standing leaning against the trunk of a pine tree, hands in his pockets. Deirdre stirred the sun-warmed pine needles with the tip of a narrow, suède-shod foot, seemingly very intent on her task.

"It's like a tent here, isn't it?" she asked. "A tent with green walls and a blue ceiling——"

"Or a fairy ring—a charmed circle——"

"I think it *is* a fairy ring—look at the orchestra stalls they've left behind!" She pointed to a group of scarlet and amber freckled toadstools at the foot of a beech tree. "They come and act 'Midsummer Night's Dream' here, and that's where Titania and Oberon and the Court Ladies sit, but when the cock crew they

had to fly in such a hurry that the fairy scene-shifters forgot to pack up the toadstools!"

They laughed at each other, and Guy said gaily:

"Of course, why you know so much about it is because you're a fairy yourself——"

"Yes—my birthday's on Midsummer's Eve."

"Proof positive! You see, you haven't forgotten absolutely everything about Fairyland—they let you remember just a little bit so that you could think of it when you got depressed. For instance, I daresay you can remember the exact words of Titania and Oberon's historic tiff, and what Titania wore at her at homes on Thursday nights, and how much fairy gold the Chief Fanner got a year for fanning the moon on ball nights, so that she gave her best light and didn't feel faint."

"Ah!" said Deirdre mysteriously, "those are all secrets, and I don't think I ought to tell you. I might some day, though." Her mind went off at a new tangent. "My birthday—that reminds me! I shall be twenty-one!" Her expression of mingled surprise, horror and amusement was very funny.

"We're getting on in life, aren't we?"

"Yes, we're getting on. Twenty sort of creeps in without any fuss, but twenty-one seems to give you a jolt. It's so definitely leaving the 'teens behind! It doesn't seem three years ago that we met in the wood, does it?"

"Three years ago——"

There was a small tense silence, then Deirdre said slowly:

"Yet it seems very long ago, after all I sometimes wonder if we didn't dream it, Guy. When I think of it, it seems unsubstantial—dream-like. Perhaps that's why it didn't last. Dreams are unsatisfactory things at best—they—they break so dreadfully quickly."

"*Don't!*" said Guy in a strange, breathless voice. All the laughter had faded from his eyes—very suddenly he looked tired and old. Again silence—a little shivering silence. Then Guy turned, and looked at her, still silently. He tried to say something, and failed miserably—his mouth was twitching. Then came the inevitable, which Deirdre had dreaded so much.

All at once it seemed as if the last band of his control snapped, and he was down on his knees beside her, his dark head in her lap, his shoulders heaving with terrible rending sobs.

Deirdre sat looking down at him. She felt no passion now, no delirious emotion. Every feeling in her was swamped in a vast tenderness. With a gentle hand she stroked the dark hair, noticing in an odd subconscious way how it grew into a peak on his neck, like a little boy's—Guy as a little boy—suddenly she knew how he had looked. Sturdy and solemn-eyed, with a slow, grave smile, and an adorable cheek that asked for kisses. She saw him running over a sunny lawn, falling down, and picking himself up with stately dignity. She saw him at prep. school, with ruffled hair and grubby hands—bird-nesting in the holidays. She saw him as a tall, long-legged boy at public school, walking along with hands in pocket and straw hat tilted back from his gay face. She saw him

winning the half mile, sprawling into the tape all long arms and legs——

Then she looked down at the kneeling figure beside her, still shaking noiselessly. Her own eyes were dry and hot, but her mouth was all broken up with quivering.

Presently he lifted his face—that smooth boyish face, twisted and terribly old. Her hand dropped from his head to his shoulder, then she laid it gently against the brown cheek. He seized and held it, pressing his mouth against the soft, childish palm.

Absurdly she said, her voice a little unsteady:

"What a darling little boy you must have been, Guy——"

She laughed a little at her own absurdity.

Guy, not deceived by the laugh, looked up and saw the broken-up quivering of her gallant smile.

"Ah, don't!" he said. "Don't!"

He laid his head on her knees again and put his arms round her protectively.

They stayed a little while silently like this—like two children in the dark striving to gain courage from the warm feel of each other. After a time he lifted his head and looked up into her face.

"Deirdre—darling—we've got to face it at last. We've been trying to stick it out—to keep up the farce—but now we're up against it."

"Yes, we're up against it," said Deirdre slowly. She bit hard on to her lower lip to cease its absurd trembling.

Guy thought that she was the most gallant, and at

the same time the most pathetic thing he had ever seen.

She looked down into the dark eyes and said simply and somehow beautifully:

"And I *loved* you!"

He caught hold of her passive hands.

"I loved you too, my dear—from the moment I saw you, I think. Unconsciously all the time at the 'Varsity I loved you—and afterwards in Venice—and now——"

The bitterness of life struck her, and took away a little of her glorious youth. She clung to Guy's hands tightly, as if through him she drew her courage. She said one word, steadily and softly:

"Terence——"

He drew in his breath sharply, as though someone had struck him across the face.

"Do you think I have forgotten him?" His voice sounded rough and harsh. "And I love him—that's the damnable part of the whole thing. Terence has always been a sort of hero to me, from the days when I used to fag for him at school. That he—of all men in the world—should have married you——"

He drew up her hands and held them to his eyes; his mouth beneath them was all twisted. She knew that the roughness was a shield to hide a great hurt, a terrible grief and poignant longing. Again tenderness surged up in her, and uncontrollable love.

"I'm sorry——" she said unsteadily. "I'm sorry, Guy——"

The boy took her hands away from his eyes,—they

were very bright but steady. He reached up and laid a gentle finger on her throat. It was warmly smooth to his touch, and a little pulse was beating beneath it, fluttering like a caged thing. He realized the exact extent of her courage, and was ashamed of his own weakness.

"Don't be sorry, littlest," he said gently. "It's just the—wretched way of things——"

They were silent again for a little space. Guy was remembering an incident of his public-school days.

There had been a prize offered for the best essay on Modern Poetry. He had gone in for it. He remembered the zeal with which he had written his paper, the hours he had spent looking up quotations in the school library, the nights he had lain awake thinking out epigrams and apt metaphors. He did not want the prize in the least, but he wanted to see his name on the notice board—"Melville-Rowden Prize Essay—G. M. Wyndham——"

The essay had been finished, and sent in confidently. When the result was given out it was another name on the notice board—not his. He had failed. He remembered what pains he had taken to hide his tremendous disappointment. If he was hurt, others should not see it. His friends received the impression that he didn't care a hang—had only dashed off a few pages of rot, don't you know, and sent it in for a lark, and, by Jove that he was awfully braced that Lindsay had got it. A good man, Lindsay. . . . The memory made Guy smile a little, then mentally square his shoulders. If he still had that grit, that stubborn

attitude of I'm-not-hurt-a-bit,-damn-you, then let him show it!

He got to his feet and she rose too. They stood looking at each other, very close together, piteously young, piteously brave.

"Darling, it's like this," said the boy very gently. "For Terry's sake, we've got to stick it out somehow. He mustn't know or guess—we've got to—bite hard on the blanket——"

Deirdre nodded, not trusting herself to speak.

"It will all be very simple," he went on reassuringly. "This evening after tea I'll go into Bamberly and send a wire off to myself, asking me to come back to town at once on business. I can't stay any longer—you must see that I can't stay. It wouldn't be fair to either of us, or to—Terry——"

She suddenly looked up at him with frightened eyes.

"But—but you'll stay in England? You won't go to Venice? I can see you after a little while? Oh, Guy, I'll be brave—as brave as you like, but if you go away I—I can't bear it!"

Very gently he soothed her.

"No, I won't go away, darling—just for a little while, until we both get into our stride again. Then we can be—friends, at least——"

The full bitterness of what he was saying suddenly entered like iron into his soul. They looked at each other with intense longing and hopelessness.

Then Deirdre turned away, her boyish figure in its green dress drooping as if she was deadly tired and old.

"We'd better go home," she said, and laughed on a cracked, flat note.

The pathos of her voice and bearing made the boy wince. He put his arm round the drooping figure, and like that they walked slowly back along the needle-strewn path. Once she stumbled a little, as if she was walking in her sleep, and once she groped blindly for his hand, holding it tightly in both her own. At the little landing-stage she dropped it, and suddenly stood erect with squared shoulders and back-thrown head.

"Thank you," she said simply, and then got into the canoe without looking at him again. . . .

Once more the little craft skimmed over the water like a blown leaf, pushing its nose through the tangled lily leaves, drifting out of the golden haze into the aquamarine shadow. All the way they were silent—at the boat-house, walking across the park in the shade of the chestnuts. A herd of deer were browsing on the short, sweet grass—they looked at the intruders with soft, startled eyes, poised beautifully for flight.

They went through the high iron gates in the south wall of the garden, and up the yew alley which they had traversed by moonlight. In the thick, screening shadow of the huge cedar tree on the lawn they paused listening. Voices floated down to them from the terrace—Terence's gay, infectious laugh, Olivia's stammer, and some woman's voice, smooth and somewhat silky. Then a man laughed—a hoarse, chuckling roar of laughter.

"Visitors," thought Guy. "Oh, my God! On this afternoon of all afternoons!"

Deirdre had turned on him a suddenly piteous face. She clung to him like a terrified child.

"Oh, Guy, I can't face them. I can't—*can't* bear it!"

Very softly he whispered:

"Steady—darling, darling—bite hard on the blanket!"

The panic died out of her eyes—she stood erect, and smiled into his eyes.

"You—you beautiful, gallant thing!" he said very low, almost awed by the deathless courage of her.

She smiled at him again, reassuringly, tenderly, and then side by side they passed out of the cedar's dim, drooping shade into the sunshine.

On the terrace tea was waiting—the dogs were in hopeful attendance, Olivia lying back on her sofa, chatting to a dapper little man with a small red moustache and twinkling blue eyes—Terence was sitting talking to a languid lady in a Chinese blue hat—Mrs. Vauxall of Coombe End, the Dowager's special crony, a celebrated gossip, and the object of Olivia's intense loathing.

They all stopped talking by one accord, and looked at the new-comers. Deirdre went forward perfectly assured, smiling a little, to greet Mrs. Vauxall and the blue-eyed little man, who turned out to be her brother, Sir Aubrey Manson—Guy was introduced and the gay babel of chatter broke out again.

They all noticed how brilliantly beautiful Deirdre was that afternoon—Terence, with pride, Olivia thoughtfully, Mrs. Vauxall with frosty suspicion, Sir Aubrey admiringly, and Guy Wyndham with a heart-

sick knowledge of her supreme courage. She reminded him of a gay young soldier, desperately wounded, yet fighting like a wild thing, and laughing as he fought. Her eyes seemed to have gained depth and sparkle, her curving mouth a more vivid tint—the only nervous thing about her were her hands, which fluttered as she talked, or lay twisted together in her lap.

As he carried on an aimless conversation with Mrs. Vauxall, Guy watched her talking and laughing with Terence and Sir Aubrey. From her his eyes went to Liscarney. He was sitting on the end of Olivia's sofa, looking at his wife with dog-like eyes. He wore an immaculate grey suit, and his beautifully brushed fair hair looked tawnily silver in the sunshine.

Guy stared at him with dull eyes. He came to himself with a start to find Mrs. Vauxall speaking in her curiously, silky, smooth voice.

"Lady Liscarney is charming, is she not?" she was saying softly.

Guy looked round and saw the sly, pale eyes looking at him sideways from beneath their made-up lashes. The thin red lips were sneering.

Why he should have felt her words as an insult he did not know, but all of a sudden he felt a blind fury —the blood rushed up under his dark skin. Then he turned and saw Olivia looking at him from her sofa. Sympathy, a warning, a staunch faith—those he saw in her brown eyes. He smiled at her, and smiling, turned back to Mrs. Vauxall.

"Very charming," he said quietly and pleasantly, but there was a glint of steel beneath the velvet of his voice.

CHAPTER X

THE GREAT PRETEND

I

A WEEK later Guy Wyndham was walking down Piccadilly in the May sunshine.

The pavements were crowded with people, all in gay colours and with a general air of Summer about them. The 'buses lumbering seemed to fit in with this gaiety —their paint looked fresh and vivid, and the notices with which they were plastered, advertising Sunday periodicals and the Co-optimists and José Collins, were brilliant jumbles of scarlet and jade and orange. There was a block of traffic a little further down—the policeman, implacable as a figure of Destiny, was holding up his white-gloved hands in the attitude of a dancer on an Egyptian frieze.

Guy had eyes for no one else but girls—slender girls who walked well. There were dozens of them passing along—girls with scarlet lips and audacious eyes, girls with slim, silk-hosed ankles and narrow shoes, girls with hennaed hair and delicately tinted skin, who left a sweet, subtle breath of Russian violets behind them as they walked along, girls in blue and almond-green and cinnamon—they looked like flowers—Piccadilly

became a veritable border of hyacinths, gay in the warm sunshine. At all of them Guy looked casually, and they looked back at him, softly, smilingly, haughtily, naughtily—— But he did not find the girl he was looking for—a girl with green, shining eyes, and nervous hands, and a vivid mouth. . . .

He went into his club to get his letters, and stayed talking with a man just back from America, who had been at Winchester with him. They sat talking for some time, and went out together.

Guy said good-bye to his friend and walked slowly round to his chambers at the Aldwych. He felt moody and depressed. For the last week he had been expecting the letter and the telephone call that never came. To-day's mail had been nondescript—a letter from his Press-cutting agency, his tailor's bill, a few epistles from total strangers who had read *Search,* full of praise or disapproval, a note, written on palest lilac paper, from a woman reminding him of an engagement for the following week——

No letter from Deirdre——

His large front room with its three big windows was full of warm air and sunshine. Guy flung himself down in a huge leather arm-chair, and stared up at the ceiling through half-shut eyes. The roar and rumble of the traffic in the street beneath had blended into a drowsy, not unpleasant blur, like the droning of a giant bee.

The room itself was pleasant, papered in a pale shade of cinnamon brown. In the space between the two largest windows was his desk, solid and workman-

like, covered with an untidy litter of papers and books. Books lined one side of the wall—their soft, mellow, gold-tooled bindings gave him a lazy feeling of pleasure. A big, brown leather lounge, piled with Chinese brocade cushions, stood in an alcove formed by a beautiful vermilion and gold lacquer screen. There were few pictures on the walls—a fine old print or two, subdued and gracious, a small water-colour of a Venetian lagoon by moonlight, all cold blues, and translucent greens and smoky greys. The room smelt faintly and pleasantly of Russian leather and the Egyptian cigarettes he smoked.

The drowsy, somnolent haze of the silence was stabbed sharply by the shrill voice of the telephone. Guy sprang to his feet, had crossed the room in two long strides, and picked up the receiver.

"Halloa——"

A man's voice answered, sounding absurdly thin and remote.

"That you, Wyndham? Carruthers speaking. Got two stalls for the Haymarket on Monday night. Care to come? Rather a good show, I believe——"

He answered mechanically, forcing cordial enthusiasm.

"I say, thanks awfully. . . . What? . . . oh, yes —right-oh! . . . The club at 7.30? . . . Right . . . thanks . . . cheer-oh!"

He hung up the receiver with a bang, and, going to a side table, mixed himself a drink.

Standing with the glass in his hand he looked at his bookshelves, touching with a loving finger the green

and gold binding of *Pendennis,* the brown morocco that enshrined the delicate wit of Molière, the gold tooled leather of Pepys. He seemed nervous and irritable—walking round the room fidgeting with the cushions and the papers on his desk. He went over to a window, stood listening to the subdued roar of the traffic—taxis hooting, 'buses rumbling along like modern tumbrils, newsboys, shrill messengers of the gods, running shouting among the crowd.

After a few minutes Guy crossed the room again and sat down on the leather lounge running thin fingers nervously through his dark hair. He picked up the *Morning Post,* scanned the headlines indifferently, and threw it down again. A pencil of sunshine picked out the small gold figures and tipsy pagodas on the lacquer screen, and made the plump orange shade of the tall standard lamp look like a warmly glowing Chinese lantern.

Again the telephone bell tinkled sharply. This time Guy was almost too deliberate. Putting down his glass carefully, he got up and crossed the room, picking up the receiver with assumed nonchalance.

"Halloa——"

A girl's voice this time—he recognized it even through the throaty, buzzing medium of the telephone.

"Is—is this Mr. Wyndham speaking?"

"Yes—that you, Deirdre?"

"Yes, it's me!" said the small, still voice in his ear. "We got back yesterday——"

He searched wildly for something to say, and could only manage tritely:

"I'm so glad—how are you?"

"Very well, thanks," said Deirdre brilliantly. "Can you come and dine with us at the Savoy to-morrow? We're going on to some sort of show after."

He hesitated a little——

"I—thanks awfully—yes, I should love to——"

There was a tiny silence, then:

"Guy!"

"Halloa?"

"I want to see you first—before to-morrow. Can you manage it?"

Exultation—tingling like a flame.

"Could you manage tea with me to-day, do you think?"

"Yes—somewhere where we can talk—"

"What about the Ritz—it's as quiet as a vault at tea-time?"

"That will do—I'll meet you in the lounge, then, at half-past four——"

"Right—you'll come, won't you, Deirdre?"

He heard her elusive laughter.

"Of course, you silly! Good-bye——"

"Good-bye——"

He hung up with reluctance, turning back to the brown and orange room that seemed suddenly to be full of sunshine and the scent of hyacinths. He was going to see her soon—to-day—alone! Life was all at once a splendour, a divine glory, that enveloped him in warmth like a flame.

As he stood there exulting, he caught sight of a photo that stood on his desk. It was a sentimental

souvenir of school days—a house group taken on one of his first terms. There he was, a thin little boy with solemn dark eyes and a faunish mouth. And there, in the very centre of the group, was Terence Liscarney, head of the house, a glorious creature with slicked hair and the rather self-conscious expression of a god on Olympus. Guy came closer and picked up the photo, looking at it intently. All those other faces—he remembered them so well. There was Wycome, small and dark and slim, sitting on the other side of the house-master, looking amused and a trifle bored. There was Marshall—it had been his first term there, Guy remembered—and Bentley, leader of the school orchestra—poor old Bentley, who was killed at Vimy Ridge. The long, thin boy with untidy hair was Rogers—he was in India now—and there was Beaumont, with his long, fox-like face, who had been given the sack in Guy's first year. And Fletcher—he had run across Fletcher only the other day in the Piccadilly grill, just home from ranching in Rhodesia. Again he looked at Terry. The clear, frank eyes seemed to smile up at him affectionately.

Quite suddenly Guy remembered a lot of little things about his first terms at Winchester. He had been Terry's fag—Terry had taken a fancy to him, much to his pride and delight. Terry had let him bring his prep. into his study in the evenings, and had condescended to listen sometimes while he talked. Those had been halcyon evenings—Guy could remember the lamp-light on Terence's fair hair, and the way he used to look up and grin at him occasionally. The big

boy had been genuinely fond of his fag. Guy even remembered how, when Terence was leaving, he had, with extreme embarrassment, given him a moral lecture, which, by the way, had flown completely over his head. Also he had given him a long-coveted volume of Tennyson, which Guy received with more enthusiasm. And he had promised that he would come down from Oxford on Old Boys' Day, and on various other occasions, to see how his protégé was getting on—a promise which was faithfully kept.

Guy put down the photo again—a little of his joy was dimmed by the glance of Terence Liscarney's affectionate eyes. He moved away, his forehead wrinkled, picked up his hat and stick, and went out to lunch at the club.

Something had gone wrong with the machinery of the afternoon. It was the longest that Guy had ever spent. It seemed to him as if someone had grabbed up all the hours into a bunch, and was letting the minutes slip out grudgingly one by one, like a miser giving away pieces of long-hoarded gold. He played bridge after lunch—his nerves were on edge, and his usually good game went to pieces. At four o'clock he left, and strolled over to the Ritz.

Of course he was much too early. After engaging a small table in a quiet corner, he went out into the lounge and sat down on a large brocaded settee. People passed in and out, laughing and talking—the unseen orchestra started to play one of Brahm's Hungarian dances. A large party of Americans came in, the men dapper and immaculate, the women bearing

the unmistakable American stamp of well-groomed sleekness. Every time the big doors swung open Guy glanced towards them eagerly, but although many girls passed through them, the one he was looking for did not. Once he thought he saw her, but was disappointed. Panic seized him that she might not come, but a glance at his watch reassured him. After all, he was to blame for coming so early.

It seemed to him that all the girls of the morning had gathered here again, with their mysterious eyes, and scarlet lips, and slender ankles, swaying past him with an alluring rustle of silk and lace, leaving behind them the faintest of sweet, subtle perfumes.

She was late, of course, coming into the lounge and looking round her in a sweet flurry. Guy did not get up for a minute, but sat on, dallying with the dear delight of watching every line and tint and poise of her.

Then he crossed over to her—she saw him coming a long way off.

"Oh, there you are! Am I late? I generally am!"

"Not at all"—forgetting five minutes of panic-stricken waiting—"how ripping to see you!"

She smiled up at him, in a way that almost made Guy forget they were in the lounge of the Ritz, and that many eyes were watching them.

He piloted her to their table. They sat down in a little alcove, screened from the eyes of the curious by a large palm and a bank of rose-flushed azaleas. The waiter discreetly vanished, and they were alone, looking at each other over the little table.

"You—you look stunning!" said Guy, like a boy.

She drew off long gloves, laying them on the table beside a small jewelled bag. Then she looked at him softly, like the Deirdre of Gilly's Wood. "If you knew how—good it was to see you!"

He leant forward a little, dark eyes ardent.

The waiter reappeared like a discreet wraith, bearing a covered dish of buttered toast.

Deirdre picked up the tea-pot, enquiring as to Guy's tastes in cream and sugar. Their fingers met as he took the cup, brushed for a leaping second. The orchestra was playing "The Mikado"—the violins like voices joining in with the deeper notes of the 'cello.

"Braid the raven hair, paint the pretty face——"

Deirdre listened a moment before she said uncertainly, not looking at him:

"I suppose you're wondering why I wanted to see you?"

"I don't mind *why*—as long as you're here! This week has been the longest I've ever spent!"

For a moment her guard slipped, and she leant forward eagerly, eyes shining.

"Oh, has it been with you too? When you left I couldn't bear the country! I was almost a little mad, I think—the silence used to make me want to scream! I—I made Terry come up to town sooner than we were going to, just—just to see you again——"

He did not answer—he was too enraptured watching the tilt of her lips, and the way her lashes made a

little lilac shadow on the warm whiteness of her skin.

"I wanted to see you," said Deirdre hesitatingly. "To—sort of break the ice. It was Terry's idea—the Savoy to-morrow, and I felt that I couldn't meet you with Olivia and Terry looking on—I was sure that I should collapse, and make a fool of myself." She looked at him with a little smile that was somehow pathetic. "I'm not as brave as you think, Guy—In fact, I'm a beastly coward——"

His warm gaze surrounded her, like the clasp of impetuous arms.

"Coward? You absurd baby!"

"Oh, but I am! And I feel guilty, too. The others don't know I'm here. Terry's out, and Olivia departed with the nice Mallory boy to a *thé dansant*. So I came along. Do you think it's wicked of me?" Her eyes were wistfully inquiring.

He felt a quite unexpected rush of anger.

"Wicked? Deirdre, remember that whatever you do is good. You couldn't be wicked if you tried. The word—the word—it's a horrible word—I wish you wouldn't use it——"

She looked at him teasingly, softly.

"Why, look at the child! He's getting quite angry! Look at his eyes sparkling and his mouth setting into an I'll-know-the-reason-why line! Do take off that expression, Guy, and have an anchovy sandwich——" She pushed the plate towards him smilingly.

"Oh Lord, I don't want a sandwich! I want to sit and look at you, although I know it's a pastime which will cost me dear later on."

"Why?" she enquired, pouring herself out another cup of tea.

"Because I shall wake up in the night thinking of you, and seeing you sitting in the darkness by my bed, smiling at me. And there will be no more sleep for me that night——"

The violins were wailing, sobbingly——

"A wandering minstrel, I, a thing of rags and patches——"

The azaleas drifted to them a wave of faint, subtle fragrance. Deirdre felt her defences crumbling, breaking down one by one. She said desperately:

"Oh, Guy, don't——"

"Don't what?"

"Don't talk like that. Remember we're friends now —nothing more than friends. Don't—don't make it harder for me than it is already——"

The boy saw with anger against himself that her lips were trembling, and that she was twisting her hands together as if trying to control herself. He said swiftly:

"I'm sorry—it's when I look at you that I forget —Deirdre, it's going to be hard—harder than you realize——"

Her smile was gallant.

"We can fight, though—we must!"

He looked at her miserably, his sensitive mouth twitching a little. The tension was relieved by a waiter who appeared with a tray of fascinating French cakes. Mechanically Deirdre chose the ones she wanted, and he lifted them on to her plate—Guy re-

fused them curtly, and the waiter disappeared like a noiseless, efficient shadow.

Deirdre went on musingly:

"Why, it was you who told me to 'bite hard on the blanket!' Why this sudden collapse of your courage? We must be friends—after all, that's something—we can be friends all our lives. And Terry mustn't suspect or have cause to suspect anything. That's only fair, Guy——"

A tall, slender girl, dressed in a curious shade of amber with a large black hat, passed their alcove, followed by a big, rather distinguished looking man with sleek grey hair and square dark-skinned face. As they passed the girl shot them a casual glance from slightly bored, red-brown eyes, and recognition leapt into them. She smiled and called out:

"Halloa Deirdre!"

Deirdre waved her hand gaily, and then turned to Guy.

"That is Lady Norma Mills—lovely, isn't she? She and I stayed at the Westcotes' together." After a minute she said slowly: "Guy, I wish you'd marry some nice, beautiful girl like Norma. I shouldn't mind if only I knew you were happy. It's knowing that you are unhappy that hurts."

To her relief the boy's mood had passed, and he smiled at her mockingly, tenderly, in his old way.

"My blessed child! Your remedy is like offering Jupiter in a fury a cough-drop to suck! I ought to be angry with you, but I won't. No, we'll just stick it out, as you said, and perhaps when we're old, old

people we'll have forgotten all about it and you'll look at me and say—'How could I have thought that I loved him!' "

"And you will say—'She hasn't worn well, poor thing! Ah me, what a foolish youth I was!' "

Her lips were smiling, but there was a little shake in her voice. When one is twenty-one, and sitting opposite the man you love best in the world, the prospect of an old age when passion shall have faded, and toned down into a mellow mezzotint of friendship, seems remote and extraordinarily dreary.

Guy heard that forlorn little quiver, and suddenly his voice was beautifully gentle.

"You brave, forlorn little thing! You're as gallant as a soldier outwardly, but I believe you're crying underneath the gallantry, aren't you?"

Her hands went to her breast in a little, nervous fluttering gesture.

"Oh, *don't!*" she said piteously. "Please be gay, and —and jolly. If you're not, I—I shall be a fool, and I *can't* be—not here in the Ritz anyway!"

He wanted desperately to go and put his arms round her and defy the world, but he just sat on looking at her—looking at her.

"It's funny," she said slowly. "I thought by marrying Terence that I had escaped from everything ugly and unhappy. And now here I am, with all the beauty I wanted, and—and Terence to love me, and I'm miserable——"

"You won't be after a little while, Dear. No misery lasts, however deep it is. And Terence loves

you with all his heart. We mustn't think of ourselves—only of him. We must just put our own feelings on one side, and concentrate on *his* happiness. He's worth it, you know, Dear."

She said nothing, so he went on, a tinge of deeper feeling vibrating in his voice in spite of himself.

"If only the Powers that be had kept me out of your life for ever—The cruellest cut of all was sending us together again when it was too late. Oh, Deirdre, if only you'd waited——"

Her voice was soft and a little shaken.

"Does one ever wait—at eighteen? I really didn't realize that I loved you, only that I wanted you to come back desperately badly. And the gates of Prison were closing in on me—Terence stood just outside, the only means of escape. Aunt Vi died very suddenly—I was all alone—I don't think my mind was working properly. When I was normal again—we were married."

A little silence.

Then:

"How those azaleas smell!" said Deirdre. "They're almost—overpowering——"

She suddenly pushed back her plate with a little crash. "I must go."

She picked up her gloves and started nervously and clumsily to drag them on. Her eyes looked tired and heavy.

Together they passed through the lounge, away from the rose-lit corner, away from the scent of the azaleas and the wailing violins. Deirdre dropped her

little brocaded bag, and Guy picked it up for her—her fingers felt numbed and curiously stiff.

"Are you going to walk home?" he asked. "Or is your car here?"

"I'm going to take a taxi," she said. "And trundle round for a bit before I go home."

The commissionaire called a taxi for her, and she got in, pausing with a foot on the step.

"Good-bye, and thank you very much. To-morrow night I shall be—oh, so brave again! That's what I wanted this meeting for, to get us into our stride. Good-bye, Guy and—don't worry, will you?"

She said to the taxi-driver:

"Drive round St. James's Park for about half-an-hour or so, and then to 57, Clement Street, please——"

Guy shut the door, and stood back, raising his hat.

The taxi rumbled away. Inside Deirdre sat in her corner, huddled into rather a pathetic heap, staring out at the busy thoroughfare with unseeing eyes.

II

Olivia was in love—for the moment.

Deirdre, used to the astounding heaps of her versatile affections, looked on and smiled, while she let Chris Mallory monopolize her. This arrangement was entirely satisfactory to them all—Deirdre because Chris was a "nice boy," Olivia for the practical reasons that he danced perfectly, and knew the sort of chocolates she liked, Sam the Sealyham because Mr. Mallory had nice calves, and knew how a dog liked to be talked to. So Miss Bellamy went to *thés dansants,*

matinées, and the Motor Show, escorted by the charming and ingenuous Chris, and everyone was happy.

This arrangement left Deirdre a good bit to herself, for Terence, outwardly grumbling but secretly quite pleased, had to run down to Greyfriars to look after things. Alarming reports had reached him about the state of the crops—Jenkins, the agent, was apparently very much overworked—he wanted Terence's advice about this and that. The crop in the ten-acre field was ruined—Some cottages by the mill were in urgent need of repairs—There was a new reaper on the market which would save double the labour.

Hearing all this, Terence fretted restlessly in London. He wanted to be at Greyfriars himself—on the spot, where he could keep an eye on things. So at last he announced that he was going down to Sussex for a few weeks to take charge of affairs, as to be away any longer from his beloved estate would be sheer torture. Besides, "that ass Jenkins" was sure to bungle things by himself.

Deirdre had announced her intention of going with him, only to be vigorously howled down.

"Rubbish! Think I'm going to let you miss the Season to vegetate in the country? No, you stay up here—you'll be quite all right with Olivia and Jingle to look after you."

Deirdre made a desperate last effort.

"But, dear, won't you be lonely without me? Mater's going away, and——"

"Lonely? My dear girl, I won't get *time* to be lonely! There's any amount of work to be done."

Deirdre laughed at his important air.

"Terry, 'fess that you don't mind going very much——!"

"I—oh, well,—I don't really, except for leaving you. I love Greyfriars and pottering round the estate, and wearing old tweeds instead of appearing immaculately attired at *thés dansants* and theatre parties!"

"How long will you be away?" asked Deirdre.

"About a month, I'm afraid. Perhaps not that—it depends. But Jingle will trot you round—he'll love it—and you two get on so well together."

Deirdre, looking at his frank face, wished desperately that he was not so guileless. Anything was better than this attitude of unsuspicious innocence.

"Well, I'll run down for week ends, Terry, dear, to see how you're getting on. But I'm not really very sorry for you, for I know you'll revel in it."

So Terence had departed, relieved to escape a month of the loathed season, and leaving Guy Wyndham as his aide-de-camp.

Deirdre could see no way out of accepting this new, intimate comradeship with Guy, which Terence himself thrust upon her. To refuse to see anything of him would raise—if not suspicion—at least astonishment in Terry's simple soul. Besides, it would seem morally cowardly, and Deirdre was schooling herself to a new and Spartan courage which admitted not even a thought which was disloyal to Terry. She flattered herself that she was succeeding, therefore with a gay recklessness she snatched up the challenge which was flung down

to prove her worth, careless how it might hurt or test her strength.

The month slipped away on dancing feet. It was a hot summer, and London lay shimmering in a haze of heat. Despite the weather, all London was dancing. Guy and Deirdre danced with it, dreaming away that golden month.

He escorted Deirdre and Olivia, with Mr. Mallory in attendance, to the Derby—Deirdre's very first Derby, where she sat with thumping heart and shining eyes and watched the favourite romp home. They made the most of that golden month—packing into it everything they possibly could. Deirdre revived all her old acquaintance with London's famous houses and streets, this time with the ideal companion.

One afternoon they went to the Zoo, where Deirdre fed the bears with buns, took a dislike to the monkey-house because of its smell, and was fascinated by the perfect grace and topaz eyes of the lions.

So they played together, trying rather pathetically to forget the shadow between them in a whirl of gaiety.

The Frivolity was the home of the Goddess Jazz—one of those rose-pink and gilt places where the younger set gather together to dance. They went there to dance one afternoon.

Deirdre had often been there, but never before with Guy. She wore all black with an audacious hat, and because she was happy, she was beautiful.

The place was full—Deirdre liked the crowd. She liked to be in the centre of the eddying swirl of

humanity, with Guy's arms round her, Guy's dark eyes looking down into hers. They danced together perfectly—people watched them a good deal. They were an extraordinarily beautiful pair, Guy, slender and well knit, Deirdre with her cheeks flushed—her shining, shining eyes. A small slim girl in orange with a bird of Paradise sweeping round her brown hat, called out as she passed in the arms of a pallid youth with pale eyes:

"'Loa, Deirdre!"

"'Loa, Betty!"

As they were swept on into the maze of dancers.

"That was Betty Van Sittart," said Deirdre. She was frowning a little. "She's a dear, but she will chatter about everyone and everything. In a day everyone will know that we have been dancing at the Friv. together—the story much elaborated, and with many embroideries, of course——"

Guy laughed suddenly.

"Who cares?" he said.

Deirdre's mouth tilted into a smile.

"Who cares?" she echoed defiantly.

They were both a little intoxicated by their nearness, the music, the shifting mosaic of dancers.

Glorious Folly tingled in their veins like a fire.

CHAPTER XI

STRAWS

I

Two weeks——
Ten days——
One week——

The days slipped away from beneath their eager fingers. Every day they dined or danced together, went out in the car, to the theatre, rode in Rotten Row. Sometimes Olivia was with them—more often they were alone. People began to talk, led by Mrs. Vauxall. They danced on together, careless of what the world was saying.

Deirdre was only brought down to earth by something that Dahlia said one day at tea. It was a grey day, bereft of sunshine. Outside, the streets, wet with rain, were glistening like wet oilskin. Inside the lamps were lit and the soft, rose-shaded light gleamed on the silver and delicate china of the tea table. Deirdre, in a grey dress like a mist cloud, was curled up in a big arm-chair pensively nibbling a macaroon. Her hair was done in the American way—a soft mass of clustering curls at the back. Dahlia, looking at her, again stoutly denied within herself that all the countless

rumours going round the town were true. It seemed impossible that this soft, childish creature, with her clear eyes and gay smile, could be touched and smirched by the breath of scandal. Yet Dahlia was sick at heart that Terry was going to be hurt by it all—Terry, who she loved like her own brother, Terry, who had fought with her, and squabbled and kissed her and given her a guinea-pig years and years ago . . . Now, with extraordinary minuteness, she remembered that guinea-pig. It had been warm and soft, with sleek black fur, and a crumpled pink rose-leaf of a nose.

Deirdre was speaking. She dragged herself back to listen.

"Isn't this a rotten day for July to spring on us? I *hate* these grey, dull days——"

She broke off a piece of macaroon and gave it to the Sealyham. Dahlia watched her with affectionate, yet strangely watchful eyes.

"What are you doing this evening, Deirdre? As Olivia has a cold, and you're all alone, why don't you come round and dine with us? Gervase hasn't seen you for ages."

Deirdre took up the silver tea-pot, smiling at her.

"Dahlia darling, I'd love to, but I'm booked up for this evening. Guy is taking me to the new show at the Palace, and we're dining at the Savoy."

Dahlia put down her cup with a little crash, and suddenly sat up with a little air of determination that would have been funny if it hadn't been so serious.

"Deirdre, are you merely foolish and very innocent,

or totally deaf and blind, or are you just recklessly running your head into the net? I can't decide for myself."

Deirdre stopped eating macaroons, and looked up at her in bewilderment.

"What—what on earth do you mean?"

Dahlia's brown eyes were glittering.

"Just this—I'm going to tell you frankly, because I think you're too childish to know. The common gossip of the town is coupling your name and Guy Wyndham's together."

"Oh—" said Deirdre breathlessly. And then again, like a rather frightened little girl—*"Oh!"*

Dahlia felt an immense pity for her, and at the same time an immense fury.

"Oh, Deirdre, couldn't you have *guessed*—you're not a child—you know what Mrs. Vauxall and her set are like. And yet deliberately you—oh, Deirdre!"

Deirdre was not looking frightened or childish any more. She was sitting upright, with narrowed eyes and tightly folded lips. Her voice when she spoke was like steel, and it hurt Dahlia as no tears could have done.

"As you have gone so far, you may as well tell me the rumours that Mrs. Vauxall has been kind enough to spread. It won't hurt me——"

Dahlia rumpled her flaming hair with a nervous hand. She did not look at the slim figure in the chair, but away out of the window at the grey houses, the grey skies——

"They were all—they were all rather beastly,

Deirdre. The—the usual thing, you know——"

She paused uncertainly.

There was a tense silence, then the erect, slender figure seemed to crumple up in the big chair.

"Oh, the beasts!" sobbed Deirdre. "Oh, the dirty, damnable *beasts!*"

Dahlia could find no words for consolation. She just crossed over to the forlorn, crumpled little figure, and put her arms round it, patting and stroking the slim, shaking shoulders. She looked round at the tousled curls—the pretty, pretty curls all disarranged and untidy.

"There, there," she said helplessly. "There, there, darling——" The words she would have used to console Porzie after a tumble!

The futility of using them in this case struck her sharply. She went on patting and stroking, her eyes very tender.

Presently Deirdre sat up and pushed back the hair from her eyes. They were still furiously angry, although the soft mouth was trembling like a hurt child's.

"Dahlia," she said, "it wasn't true. You don't believe it, do you, Dahlia? That—that devil of a woman! Oh, Dahlia, you do believe me, don't you?"

Her hot little hands clutched at Dahlia's cool ones.

"Of course darling," said Dahlia soothingly. "There, there, sweetheart. Don't you worry—there, there ——"

"Oh, you're good, Dahlia!" said the forlorn little voice. She hid her tear-stained face in Dahlia's slim shoulder. Presently she said in a muffled voice:

"Was—was there anything else?"

"There were—several other things which you needn't know, dearest. I know that they're a pack of abominable lies, but, still—false mud sticks as well as genuine mud, Deirdre, especially when it's thrown by Mrs. Vauxall's set——"

"Is—is she in London now?" asked Deirdre.

"She is, more's the pity. I loathe the woman—cut her dead in Bond Street this morning. She had a friend of ours with her, too."

"A friend of ours?"

"The Dowager——" said Dahlia. "Deirdre, that woman hates you just as much as Terry loves you. Even though she adores him I believe she'd like to see you—get the worst of things, even though it would break Terry's heart."

"Yes," said Deirdre slowly. It would break Terry's heart." She said, with another rush of sobs, "Oh, Dahlia, I don't *want* Terry's heart to be broken!"

Dahlia hardly knew whether to laugh or cry. She said soberly:

"He was a fool ever to go away and leave you, but he's as guileless as you are. You're just a pair of silly babies. But when he comes back he's sure to hear a rumour or something about it, and it will *hurt* him——"

Up went Deirdre's head.

"He won't believe it! Terry will know it's not true——"

"Of course he will, but—but the smirch remains. You see what I mean, darling? The—foulness of the

mud will stick, and Terry will be miserable, even though he knows that it's not true——"

Deirdre lifted a forlorn face.

"Then what can I do? I—I don't know what to do——"

"You must kill all these rumours," said Dahlia with finality. "At *once*. You mustn't go about with Jingle again. People have seen you together everywhere—Norma Mills, Betty Van Sittart—and you know what a babbler that girl is. But first of all I want you to answer a question. You may be angry, but I don't care. It's for your own good——" She hesitated, then took the plunge with characteristic impetuosity. "Do you *love* Guy Wyndham, Deirdre?"

Deirdre drew a long breath sharply, as if someone had struck her in the face. Her eyes were steady, and clear as a child's.

"Yes," she said simply and quietly, "I do——"

Silence for a moment, then Dahlia made a funny little gesture.

"That complicates matters," she said slowly.

Deirdre suddenly leant forward and put her hand on Dahlia's knee.

"He loves me too," she said simply. "We met over three years ago, when we were children, in a wood. I think we loved each other then, only we didn't realize it until it was too late—too late——" It was raining again outside, with a gentle, swishing, plaintive sound, like someone sighing. Deirdre went on softly: "Dahlia, Aunt Vi took me away from the home I loathed and hated, and gave me a brief happiness.

She died. Terence asked me to marry him. It meant either going back again to prison, or escaping by marrying him. Do I sound horribly mercenary, Dahlia? I—I didn't mean to be. It was just that I wanted to get out into happiness. I meant to make Terry very, very happy. Do I sound horrid?"

"No, darling," said Dahlia gently. She was curiously moved by the simple little narrative.

"Of course I thought of Guy," said Deirdre. "I didn't exactly *love* him—it was just that I—wanted him so badly. I used to dream that he was standing laughing at me, and I couldn't get to him. I used to wake up crying and calling him——"

"But where was Guy then?" asked Dahlia. "You knew where he lived, didn't you?"

Deirdre shook her head.

"We didn't even know each other's surnames. We were just Guy and Deirdre to each other until he had to go away suddenly to Italy. We never met again until this year."

Somehow the simple words were tragic. Dahlia stroked her hand, her brown eyes wet.

"Oh, poor, poor!" she said crooningly. "You poor little thing! And to think that I *knew* Jingle all the time, when you were looking for him!"

Deirdre nodded, her smile a little quivering.

"Well, there I was. I could either wait for Guy, or take Terry. If I had been quite normal at the time, I don't think I'd have married Terry. But Aunt Vi died very suddenly—I was ill. Just for a little while I think I wasn't perfectly sane. So I married him."

"Poor, poor!" said Dahlia again petting that slender hand.

"We travelled a lot, as you know. In the wonder of all the beautiful things I saw, I forgot—or thought I did. Then one night at the opera early in Spring we met again. Oh, Dahlia, the boy of Gilly's Wood—Guy—was Terence's best friend!" Her mouth was all twisted and trembling. "Even then I don't think I really realized the truth. Or if I did I fought against it—for Terry's sake. Terry was so sweet to me, Dahlia, so dear and good. His hair in the sunshine—have you ever noticed how silvery it is? And the way he laughs—like a schoolboy——"

Dahlia looked at her a little anxiously, but her voice was perfectly steady, her eyes sane. She went on in the same curiously emotionless voice, as if she was talking of someone else, and not herself.

"We *both* fought until a day in May down at Greyfriars, when we just had to come face to face with things. I—it was awful, Dahlia. But Guy said that we must still stick it out for Terry's sake. He said that we must 'bite hard on the blanket.'"

She laughed a little, with a curiously tinkling sound.

"Yes, that sounds like Guy," said Dahlia. "He's a nice boy, Deirdre—an extraordinarily nice and brilliant boy. I'm sorry—for both your sakes."

"You're a darling, Dahlia," said Deirdre. "And I'm glad that you're happy, anyway, with Gervase and your blessed Porzie." She bent down and petted the little white dog who was regarding her with bright and anxious eyes. "So you see how it is? If I

hadn't been such a fool as to let myself be talked about no one would have known. As it is, everyone knows—or think they know; the beasts." The colour ran up under her skin in a hot flush. "Oh, Dahlia, what shall I do? Tell me what to do——"

Dahlia pondered deeply, running slim fingers through her flaming red hair. She took a cigarette from a silver box on the table, and lit it slowly, looking at Deirdre through the curling lilac haze.

"Guy must go away," she said firmly. "Before Terence comes back, too. Then get Terry to take you abroad somewhere, where you'll forget all this wretched business. Fill your life with new things, stuff your mind with beauty and new interests and friends. Do *anything,* only for God's sake try and forget Guy Wyndham. Stay away for some time, and when you come back Mrs. Vauxall and her gang will be throwing mud at some other unfortunate. That's the best thing to do, darling."

"Yes, that's the best thing to do," said Deirdre slowly. She sat staring straight in front of her, dry-eyed, firm-lipped. "Shall I put off your dinner and theatre to-night, then?"

Dahlia deliberated.

"No, I shouldn't. You've got to tell Jingle some time, so it may as well be to-night. And watch the people, dear—see if they stare at you, the beasts, and whisper and snigger. Darling, I hate to say that but they *do,* you know. I don't expect you've ever noticed it before, bless you—in some ways you're as innocent and childish as Porzie. I think that some

part of you, like Peter Pan, has never grown up——"

Deirdre smiled a little twisted smile.

"I don't feel young—I feel old—old! Something in me has all withered and died." She turned her beautiful head and looked at Dahlia with glowing eyes. "Dahlia, are you superstitious at all? I remember saying one night in bed, when I was thinking of all the beauty in the world, and longing to get out into it all, 'I'll escape whatever it costs me! Whatever I have to pay! I'll get out!' Well, I got out, and—I paid. I wish I hadn't said that. It sounds like defying Fate—flinging a challenge into the face of Destiny."

She shivered a little, as if a sudden breath of icy air had stolen into the warm, flower-scented room.

"Rubbish!" said Dahlia with practical common sense. "I'm not superstitious like that, and anyway, I am sure the Powers that be—Destiny, or whatever you like to call it—are too great and splendid to stoop to punishing a little thing like that! Why, it would be like a big boy calling out to the little boy who dared to stand up to him—'You wait, my son! You're growing much too cock-sure of yourself, but won't I pitch into you afterwards!' "

Deirdre laughed a little.

"Wasn't it Swinburne who wrote 'Fate is a sea without shore'? That's exactly what I feel—as if I'm battling all alone in a stormy sea, and that any minute I may sink. Dahlia, if Guy doesn't go away soon I—I, the last wave of all will swamp me."

Dahlia looked at her with puckered brow.

"My dear——" she began helplessly, and then her

quick ear heard footsteps approaching outside along the corridor. "The footman's coming to clear the tea," she said hastily. "We'll go on talking about that afterwards."

When Blain threw open the wide gilded doors and advanced with cat-like noiselessness towards the tea table, he found her ladyship and Mrs. Wycome sitting discussing in animated tones the art of the Russian Ballet.

II

Guy Wyndham never quite forgot the picture that Deirdre made when he called for her that night.

She wore cloth of silver, wonderfully draped, with a thin, narrow fish train. Low on her forehead, was a pointed pearl bandeau and she carried a large jade-green feather fan. She was pale, but her mouth was vivid, and the green eyes glittering between their dark lashes. She seemed to Guy to be forcing her gaiety, even laughing with an effort.

"Do you like this dress?" she asked lightly. "I put it on specially for you!"

"I love it!" he said very low, touching the shimmering stuff with a gentle finger. As he wrapped the jade-green velvet cloak round her, his hand touched her arm. "Why, you're cold!" he said sharply. "Cold as ice! Will this thing be enough? Shall I get you a fur or something?"

Deirdre shook her head.

"No, thanks—I'm not really cold. Shall we go?"

Together they passed through the big marble-paved hall, where Littlejohn waited like a dignified shadow to speed them on their way. It had stopped raining now, and a little breeze was drying the wet streets.

Deirdre, narrow train over one arm, went daintily down the steps, her pointed silver shoes reflected in the glistening pavement, to where the chauffeur stood waiting at the door of the Rolls. She sank back against the cushions with a little sigh, Guy got in after her, the chauffeur shut the door, and the big car glided away from the kerb, smooth and noiseless.

All the way there Deirdre was laughing and talking, her eyes shining, mouth curving. Guy watched her with a touch of anxiety. Was it his imagination, or was there something tense and vibrant underlying all the gaiety? He noticed that while she talked she was restlessly turning and returning the big, square emerald on her slender fingers. Now and again she relapsed into a brooding silence, only to snatch up the tinsel domino of Laughter again desperately, and drag it over her thoughts.

The Savoy—lights—soft carpets—music—beautiful dresses. Deirdre felt an overwhelming rush of sick dread as she passed through the big doors. Here were people to face—people who Dahlia had said would stare, and whisper, and laugh. With her usual superb courage she steeled herself to meet the gaze of curious eyes, to run the gauntlet of public opinion.

With her head held a little higher than usual, a slim figure in her shimmering silver gown, she entered

the room with Guy. As they passed the tables she was aware that people stopped their conversation to stare at them. Before this afternoon, if this had happened she would have taken no notice, for she knew, indifferently, that she was beautiful, and that people stared at her a good deal. And Guy was an unusually decorative escort—besides, was not there the halo of fame round his handsome head? Ample causes for staring.

But to-night for the first time she was aware of raised eye-brows and significant smiles, of a little ripple of conversation that broke out after they had passed, like waves meeting again after being cleft by a boat. Sick at heart, but outwardly composed, she made her slow way to their table. She looked at them all as long ago she had looked at her mother's maid—with narrowed eyes, veiled and inscrutable, with a little smile, the perfection of suave insolence, hovering round her lips. In all her life she had never looked so beautiful. A little ripple ran round the crowded room, like the wind over a bed of daffodils. They sat down at their table, hovered round by an obsequious waiter. The orchestra was playing the Fantasia from Verdi's "Il Trovatore." Deirdre felt a little sick and faint, and because of this faintness she rallied herself to be more brilliant, to laugh and chat as if she had not a care in the world. Even while her heart was crying "Beasts —beasts!" her lips were smiling.

Guy watched her admiringly, and a little anxiously. He noticed that she ate practically nothing, and that her hands were never still, but fluttering like butter-

flies, twisting the big emerald, stroking the feathers of her fan. They were the only signs of inward turmoil, those nervous, fluttering hands. Otherwise she kept herself in wonderful control.

Guy exerted himself to be amusing.

If Deirdre had not been so worried she would have been genuinely amused by his gay nonsense, but now she listened with an abstracted smile. Looking at him she thought, with a little pang of misery, that he was looking more than usually good-looking to-night. He seemed very young, very boyish, very gay. And to-night she would have to send him away—for Terry's sake.

An insane anger against Terry flared up in her, and as quickly died down. She put out her hand, for her wine-glass, and lifted it perfectly steady to her lips. Somehow the nightmare meal was over, and Deirdre found herself, in a sort of stupor, threading her way again through the tables, Guy following. Again she was aware of the little ripple of whispers that followed her—again she looked at them all with a little insolent half-smile, bowing now and then to someone she knew.

At a table near the door was a party of four who had not been there long. One of the four was Mrs. Vauxall—Mrs. Vauxall in a clinging grey dress with a long rope of fine pearls round her wrinkled neck. She regarded Deirdre through uplifted lorgnettes with a sort of bleak stare. Deirdre stared back, through drooping lashes, suavely, with a delicate insolence. Then, smiling a little, she passed on. She felt rather

than saw, Mrs. Vauxall turn and say something to a fat woman in a black dress and unbelievable diamonds, her thin scarlet mouth sneering. With her head high, serene, and smiling, Deirdre passed out.

After coffee and liqueurs in the lounge they went on to the theatre. Through the whole thing Deirdre sat in a dazed dream, watching with unseeing eyes the gyrations of a chiffon-clad chorus, listening mechanically to the songs. All the time her thoughts were busily working, going round and round, round and round in objectless little circles. Guy would go away —She wondered if she would ever see him again. Probably not. Life would be funny without Guy, an empty thing, devoid of all happiness. She looked sideways at him once—his profile looked sharply white in the dim light.

"I must *remember* his face," she thought with a little choking sensation in her throat. "He's going away. I must have a clear picture of him in my brain so that I can—remember,—sometimes——"

Remember—what a ghastly word! It sounded as if Guy was dead. He was going to be dead to her, anyway. Guy—dead. She put her hand up to her throat—she felt as if she could not breathe. Guy—with his splendid youth, his warmly throbbing life, his audacious eyes. She would never see him again. It would seem as if she were dead herself.

Someone was singing on the stage.

"Mexican Maxine met me on the Matterhorn——"

A mist seemed to have come over her eyes—the brilliantly lighted stage became a multi-coloured blur.

What a noise the orchestra was making! It seemed as if a tumult of cracked discords was crashing over her head.

The theatre was very hot—the girl next to her had on Mysterieuse scent—a little too much, Deirdre thought—it overpowered her in a heavy wave of perfume. There was a clock ticking somewhere—tick, tick, tick—like blows on an anvil. It was ticking in her brain—she wanted to stop it, but she could not.

Tick, tick, tick——

"Mexican Maxine met me on the Matterhorn——"

Oh, Heavens, that orchestra!——

Tick, tick, tick, tick . . . Would no one stop it? . . . Mysterieuse scent . . . overpowering . . . tick, tick, tick . . . Guy's hand beneath her arm . . . She was somehow walking out of the theatre . . . people staring curiously . . . down a long carpeted corridor . . . into the foyer of the theatre.

Guy's voice—"Get me a taxi, please"—a bell ringing—a taxi came up grinding and snorting—it smelt musty inside—the door slammed—the commissionaire—"Where to, sir?"—"57, Clement Street, quickly"—the chink of coins—"Thank you, Sir"—then silence, blessedly, soothing silence.

It came stealing over her like cool, refreshing water. The ticking had miraculously ceased. They were swinging away into the night—the cool air was blowing in one of the windows, fanning the heavy hair on her forehead. Now and again the flickering golden haze of a street lamp stabbed the gloom, like shining hair straying over a dim mauve pillow.

"Into the night, and on,
The strength and splendour of our purpose swings,
The lamps fade; and the stars. We are alone——"

She lay back in her corner with shut eyes——

"The strength and splendour of our purpose——"

She would have to be strong—but then Love was Strength. Love never faltered, but strode on in all its splendour and pain——

She said suddenly:

"Guy!"

He turned, and smiled at her quickly.

"Do you feel better, Dear?"

"Yes, thanks—much. It was so hot in that theatre, and I—felt all of a dither, to quote Olivia! But, Guy, it is too bad of me! Why, the thing wasn't half over!"

"Oh, but it was awful rot, don't you think?" he asked boyishly. "To tell you the truth, I was bored to death, and when I turned and saw you looking white and shaky, I bounded to my feet, plucked you out of your stall, and fairly dragged you out of the theatre. Quite a sensation! I believe some of them thought it was sort of a minor diversion put on by the management! They stopped listening to 'Mexican Maxine' to watch us!"

Deirdre forced a smile. She could not find it in her heart to make him unhappy that night. She suddenly felt older than he was—years and years older. She felt, as she had told Dahlia, that something in her had withered and died, that the faintest bloom was off the glorious splendour of her youth.

The taxi was rumbling along by the Park—in a few minutes they would be home. She *could* not tell him to-night—it was too late—she was tired—she had not the courage at the moment.

"I've got something to tell you, Guy dear," she said slowly. "But I can't to-night. It's important. I—I'll write you a letter and send someone round with it in the morning so that you'll get it first thing——"

The boy looked at her a little anxiously.

"Is—is there anything wrong, Deirdre?"

She did not answer for a moment—she was thinking that in the musty interior of the cab lingered the faintest fragrance of Peau d'Espagne, the rustle of silken skirts, the ghostly tap of little high-heeled silver shoes, the memory of lips and laughter, murmurous sighs, kisses, and perhaps tears. The place seemed haunted by the plaintive wraiths of the people who had sat in its dingy dimness, as now she was sitting in her silvery gown. After them would come—whom? She roused herself to say with a smile——

"No, there's—nothing wrong—I'll explain in my letter."

She looked at him bravely. The fleeting flicker of a street lamp showed them each other's faces for a brief moment, and then again the warm dimness. But Deirdre's eyes had flooded with uncontrollable tears. She tried to keep her voice steady.

"We're in Clement Street," she said quietly. "We shall be home in a minute, Guy—dear, dear Guy—we've never kissed each other in our lives. Will you kiss me once—just once—so that I can remember?"

They were very close together in the shadows. Deirdre could feel the warmth, the throbbing, leaping life of him. It was like a flame around her—a splendid flame.

There was a little tense silence—then they put their arms round each other and kissed as children do. For a fleeting second they stayed like that—the taxi was slowing down with a horrid grinding noise. Deirdre's hands suddenly dropped in her lap.

"We're home," she said in a curiously flat, colourless voice.

Guy leant forward, looking at her face.

"Why, you're *crying!*" he said sharply. "Darling darling—you're crying——!"

"Hush!" she whispered hastily. "The man's just going to open the door. I—I—it's all right——"

She dabbed at her eyes with a minute square of cambric and lace. The taximan flung open the door—Guy got out and gave Deirdre his hand. While he paid the man she stood waiting on the steps, a slim figure wrapped in her jade-green cloak. The taxi rattled away, and he came over to her.

"I'm coming in——" he said quietly.

"Not—not to-night, Guy——"

"I'm coming in," he repeated firmly. "I want to know why you were crying—you *must* tell me, Deirdre."

He looked up at her with shining eyes, and obstinate lips. He seemed a very handsome and furious boy, flushed with absurd rage at the sight of her tears. She had never loved him more than at that moment, and

because of this she wanted him to go away, and leave her alone to fight it out by herself.

"I'll explain everything in my letter. I'm tired to-night."

His anger died as suddenly as it had flooded him.

"I'm sorry, Dear," he said penitently. "What a fool I am! Good night, Deirdre, and thank you awfully for coming."

"Good night," she said softly. "Good night."

She looked at him for a minute with a little quivering smile. For a moment her soft slenderness was silhouetted athwart the light as she opened the door. Then darkness again—she was gone.

The boy stood for some minutes afterwards staring after her, until the suspicious stare of a passing policeman roused him, and he walked leisurely homewards, his mind vaguely troubled. . . .

That night in her black and gold room, Deirdre sat writing a letter. She wrote slowly and deliberately, as if choosing her words with care.

The letter ended like this:

"So you see, dear, that is all we can do—the *least* we can do for Terry's sake and for our own sakes. We shall just have to keep out of each other's lives—I dare say it won't seem so terribly hard after a while—and when we meet again, years and years on, all the pain and longing will have faded into a blur, like the memory of a bad dream. I shall not see you again. Don't tell me where you are going, or I shall write to you, and I *mustn't*.

"My darling, I shall never forget you—never in all

my life, even if I wanted to. I want you to remember also, and yet I don't, because I hope you are going to be happy again, just as if I had never come into your life——

"I shall try and be happy too, in making Terry happy. He is so fine and splendid, and I am so terribly unworthy of him. I couldn't bear it if I thought he was unhappy. He mustn't even guess anything.

"Good-bye, Guy. When I think of you later on it will be as the boy in Gilly's Wood—the boy who said 'Would you come if you heard me calling?' But the girl who said 'You know I would'—I mustn't think of her. She's dead now—lost long, long ago.

"I'm prolonging this letter, just as if you were here talking to me, and I can't let you go. Now you know why I was crying, and I suppose I oughtn't to be crying, because we'll meet again some day—somewhere

---

"Oh, but I hate living without you—hate, hate, *hate* it! It's not like living—it's just as if I was dead. While I'm walking, and talking, and eating the soul of me will be all dead and lifeless. I *want* you——"

After reading this over, she signed her name, and then sat for a very long time, staring in front of her with dry, expressionless eyes. . . .

III

Three days later, the day before Terence's arrival home, Deirdre Liscarney stood by the window of her sitting-room and looked out at the street beneath. It

was a hot July afternoon. The sky was an intense, metallic blue over the white house-tops. Taxis rattled past the house, a few pedestrians, braving the intense heat of the afternoon, sauntered along, keeping in the shade as much as they could. The heat made people drowsy—even the roar of distant traffic had blended to a dull, somnolent hum.

Inside, the room was cool and pleasant. Roses everywhere, filling Wedgewood bowls, overflowing a big silver goblet. The Sealyham lay on the low couch, paws stretched out—he did not like hot weather. Deirdre herself looked ill. Her face seemed white and somehow pinched, and there were faint lilac smudges beneath her eyes. She wore a dress of the faintest orchid mauve organdi, the skirt spreading like the petals of a giant flower. She seemed restless and irritable, fidgeting with her dress, her hair, tapping on the window-pane. When the Sealyham grunted and stirred in his sleep she started and looked round sharply. After a bit she left the window, and sat down by her desk, playing with a quill pen.

The door was ajar, and in the drawing-room down the corridor, Olivia started playing the Sonata Pathétique. Deirdre listened dully to the sonorous opening chords. Olivia played it well, with fire and passion and a hint of restless longing. Deirdre was vaguely stirred by it. She turned her head and looked at a photo on her desk. It was a photo of Guy. The audacious dark eyes smiled at her, although the sensitive mouth was for once serious. She looked at it for some minutes, noting with subconscious pleasure

the way his hair grew, the unconsciously beautiful poise of head and neck.

"I mustn't!" she said aloud, in a dull flat voice. "I ought to burn that photo, but I—I *can't!* It's all I have left——"

Olivia had come down the long chromatic run, and begun the second movement, increasing pace and crescendo as she went along.

Three days—was it only three days ago since their last meeting? It seemed like weeks—years—eternity. And to-morrow Terence was coming home. To-morrow she would have to take up the old ways again, to appear happy when her heart was breaking, to face the world serene and smiling and alone.

Deirdre heard a voice which she did not recognize as her own say suddenly, brokenly—"I can't bear it! I can't—*can't* bear it!"

She looked again at the photo. The gay eyes seemed to be conveying a message to her——

"Courage—for a little while longer. Play up—for Terry's sake. Think of *Terry*—courage!"

She tried to think of Terry. There was a photo of him opposite Guy's. The frank eyes smiled straight into hers—his mouth was puckered at the corners into wrinkles of laughter. So clean-run and charmingly ingenuous, this Terence Liscarney. She suddenly saw how fine he was in his love, his great generosity, his perfect trust in her. Guy had said that he was worth fighting for. He was right. "Terry—think only of Terry!" said Guy's clear eyes. "Go on—*fight*—for Terry's sake!"

"Oh, but it's hard!" said Deirdre to the photo on her desk. "It's hard!"

She got up suddenly, pushing back her chair with a jarring, scraping noise. She crossed over to the Venetian mirror which hung above the mantelpiece, and looked at herself steadily, noting the shadows beneath her eyes, the pallor of her cheeks. The bloom of her seemed to have been brushed off in the short space of three days.

Deirdre laughed a little bitterly. "You look old," she told the reflection in the Venetian mirror. "Old and ugly. Three little days have made a wreck of you. What will a lifetime do?"

Somewhere in the house a door banged sharply. She started and winced, as if under a blow.

Olivia had returned to the first movement of the Pathétique—the muffled chords sounded like someone sighing. Deirdre wished that she would stop playing —it stirred her to a vague, fierce longing. . . .

Guy—Terence—herself—three little straws swirling on the shoreless sea of Fate, sucked down by the current of Destiny, half submerged in the foaming whirlpool of Love. Rebellion stirred in her suddenly. Why should it be they whom the sea of fate singled out for its victims? Why not another three? Why should it be Terence, who had never hurt a soul in his life, Guy, who seemed made for happiness, herself—what had she done to merit this unhappiness? Three little straws, swirling and tossing, helpless, at the mercy of the dark flood on which they rode, the playthings of a grim, inscrutable Power, borne onwards to—what?

Surely there must be some haven even in that storm-tossed sea—some quiet backwater where battered victims of the tempest might come safely to rest. If not, the cruel waves would suck the poor straws under to inevitable destruction. . . .

Deirdre felt a sudden slackening weakness of spirit and body. Of what avail was it to fight any longer against such odds? Three straws, helplessly drifting, swamped by the waves of Fate—no anchorage, no port—nothing. Why fight any longer? Why battle against the waves which, sooner or later, would swamp them? It was only a futile waste of strength and courage. It would be so easy to give in. . . .

"Courage!" was the message of Guy's laughing eyes. "Don't give in—think of Terry—*fight!*"

"I can't!" said Deirdre aloud, half sobbing. "I can't any longer. I want you—I love you. Don't ask me to be brave—I can't—*can't* bear it!"

It would be easy to give in. She would go to Guy now—at once—make him take her away. Her hat was lying on a chair—she snatched it up and pinned it hastily on.

Three straws on the sea of Fate . . . She would go to Guy. On her way to the door she stopped short. Her eyes had met the pictured eyes of Terence Liscarney. . . .

Those eyes conveyed no message. They just smiled into hers—straight into hers. Love was in them—an unquestioning, unselfish love—and above all things, a great trust. And she had been about to break that trust, and drag that love through the mud.

Deirdre pulled off her hat with shaking fingers. She got down on her knees by the table and said to the photo of Terence:

"How beastly of me—how cowardly and mean! I'm sorry, Terry dear—I'm sorry."

There was the sharp report of a bursting tyre from the street beneath. Deirdre started, and barely stifled the cry which rose to her lips. "Nerves," she said aloud. "Fancy me being nervous! How funny——"

She got up and walked restlessly round the room, picking up a slim volume of poems bound in green suède, putting it down again, adjusting a fold in the old gold satin curtains, fidgeting with a tiny enamel snuff-box on the mantelpiece.

"I must go away," she said suddenly. "Right away from London—somewhere where I can rest. This house is killing me. I want a month's holiday, all alone, before I take up the old life again. Where can I go, I wonder? Perhaps Dahlia would know of a place. I'll phone her now, I think."

She went to the telephone which stood on her desk, ingeniously hidden beneath the spreading satin skirts of a dainty, powdered-curled china demoiselle.

After wrestling with Exchange for some minutes, she got through to Dahlia.

"That you, Dahlia? . . . Halloa! . . . It's Deirdre speaking—Look here, I'm going away for a month or so. Can you recommend a place to go to?"

Dahlia's pleasant drawling voice—one of the very few that do not suffer from the metallic medium of

the telephone—came back to her after a slight hesitation.

"Well, darling, it all depends what sort of place you want—gay or otherwise?"

"Oh, otherwise—decidedly otherwise. Somewhere in the heart of lovely country—near the sea, perhaps. I don't know. Anyway somewhere where I can lead a vegetable marrow existence—just basking and lazing away the days."

After another pause, Dahlia said jubilantly:

"Got it! Why not try Purse Pomeroy?"

"Purse *what?*"

"Purse Pomeroy. Funny, isn't it? South Devon—little fishing village—haunt of artists, but they're quite harmless. I took Porzie there last Summer, and absolutely loved it. Glorious scenery—all one does there is sleep, and eat enormously, and bathe, and ramble over the moors, and go mackerel fishing, and sleep again——"

"Exactly the place I want! How lovely! Where did you stay, Dahlia?"

"Oh, there's an hotel of a nondescript sort, but I stayed at a cottage on the cliffs—gorgeous view—dear little place. A dear old soul called Mrs. Dean has it—she cooks awfully well and all that. I am sure that would suit you, Deirdre, and I don't expect she's got anyone there."

"Dahlia, you angel! What's her address?"

"Mrs. Dean—Cliff Cottage—Purse Pomeroy—South Devon. Got it? I should write at once——"

"I will—to-night. It sounds the most ideal place.

Thank you awfully. How is Gervase? I saw his cartoon of the Prime Minister in the *Sketch*—simply splendid! And Porzie?"

"Porzie is in the best of health and spirits. This morning he played Red Indians, and tried to scalp the kitten. Great opportunity for me to lecture on 'kindness to animals'! But he doesn't care, bless him."

A little pause, then Dahlia said hesitatingly:

"Darling, how are you getting on?"

"Badly. I make a poor hero, Dahlia."

"We all do when it comes to the point, I think."

"I nearly threw my cap over the windmill this afternoon with a vengeance!"

"Deirdre! Oh, darling, do be careful! Please, please don't do anything rash, for all your sakes! You'll only be unhappy afterwards——"

"Don't be anxious, Dahlia dear. I'm quite sane now. And after this holiday I'll be like a giant refreshed. I'm going all alone to think things out. Good-bye, darling."

"Good-bye, Deirdre—bless you——"

IV

The next day Terence came home. He looked very brown, very tall and fit. Quite openly he was amazed and rather pathetically delighted at the warmth and tenderness of Deirdre's welcome. She took an unwonted interest in everything he had to tell her about the estate; the dinner that night consisted of all his favourite dishes, and he caught her looking at him, not once but several times, with eyes which were rather

wistful. Terence was in the seventh heaven of delight. Every time that Deirdre met the glance of his affectionate blue eyes, she felt her courage stiffen. Guy had been right—Terence *was* worth fighting for.

That night, while Olivia was curled up on the sofa with a box of chocolates and *Under Two Flags,* and Terry was holding forth upon the state of the crops, a land dispute, and partridges, Deirdre managed deftly to slip in her idea of going away for a month or so.

"Of course," said Terence. "We're going to Deauville as usual."

"Terence, would you mind if I went alone?"

"Alone to Deauville?"

"No, not to Deauville. I want to go to a place Dahlia recommended in Devon—Purse Pomeroy——"

"Very well," said Terence, puzzled but amiable. "But what's the idea?"

"I—I haven't been very well lately—my nerves are all jumpy. I want to get right away and laze all by myself. It will be a rest cure for me——"

"And what about the children?"

"Chris Mallory's people are very anxious to have Livvy for a month at their place in Yorkshire, so I shall let her go. Howard is going away to Brittany with three college friends of his. Mother wants Roly to go over to Mentone for his holidays—— So that disposes of *them!* But what about you, Terry?"

"I think I shall go to Deauville with the Wycomes —I know they are going. I don't really like letting you go, but I suppose that Parker will look after you all right——"

"I am not taking Parker——" said Deirdre serenely. "She is going to have a holiday with her sister-in-law at Shoreham."

"But are you going *alone?*"

"Except for Samiwell!"

Terence appealed to Olivia.

"Do you hear that? This girl wants to go gadding off by herself!"

Olivia looked up crossly, flicking two large tears off her lashes.

"I w-wish you'd leave me *alone!* Poor d-darling Cigarette is just dying, and you come butting in with your bally questions! What's that? Oh, I don't care if she goes to C-colney Hatch as long as you don't talk to me!"

Terence grinned, and turned back again to his wife.

"Well, I suppose it will be all right! What's the name of the place, d'you say?"

"Purse Pomeroy—Dahlia has been there and loved it. Now let's arrange details."

They arranged the date of Deirdre's departure—(providing Mrs. Dean could take her)—and other matters, until they went to bed. Only then did Terence remember to ask the question that Deirdre dreaded:

"By the way, how's old Jingle getting on?"

Deirdre managed to say fairly naturally:

"He's very well, but he has gone away for a month or two."

"To rest after all this writing, eh? Oh well, he deserves a good holiday. Gone to Deauville or where?"

"I really don't know," said Deirdre carelessly. Looking at Terry, she wondered what he would say if he knew the pain his innocent query had given her. Dear Terry, always so tenderly careful of her, and now, unawares, dealing her dagger-thrust after dagger-thrust of misery!——

Mrs. Dean's letter came in a few days, saying that her rooms were empty and that she would be very pleased to take the young lady.

Deirdre sent her a wire to say that she was arriving next day, arranged with the Mallorys about Olivia, wrote to her mother and Roly, and with great satisfaction labelled her trunks to "Purse Pomeroy—via Paddington." Mr. Weller was also in a state of much excitement. He had seen Parker pack many cotton frocks, a bathing suit, and his Belovèd's golfing brogues, so he rightly conjectured that they were to leave the Town of Many Pavements, and seek "fresh woods and pastures new." This, of course, meant going in a train, which rocked and bumped and made a fellow's inside feel as if it were sinking into his paws, but what lay at the other end of the journey quite made up for it. Grass! and lanes! ! and rabbits! ! !

Therefore, at ten o'clock on Wednesday morning, the Rolls slid up to Paddington in time for the Kingsbridge train, and discharged Deirdre, an excited Mr. Weller under one arm, Terence, off to Deauville in two days, Olivia, leaving for Yorkshire the next morning, and a very large trunk, labelled "To Purse Pomeroy." While the luggage was being put in a van, and

Olivia wandered down the long train, Deirdre and Terence said good-bye.

"This is going to be a real rest-cure," she said. "So don't write to me, or expect me to write to you! I am just going to laze, and grow very, very fat!"

"Not even a postcard now and then?"

"Not even a postcard!" She looked up into his blue eyes. "Will you miss me, Terence?"

"Miss you!" He tried to say how much he loved her, what a dreary place the world was without her, and could manage to stammer like an ardent inarticulate schoolboy. "Oh, darling—I—I if you knew——"

Quickly Deidre smiled at him.

"I do know, Terry dear. But I'll be back soon—very soon, and try to make you—happier than you ever were before. Good-bye, Terry."

People were taking their seats—Deirdre and Mr. Weller got in—Olivia climbed up for a last hug—the guard waved his flag, and slowly the long train glided out of the station. Deirdre waved her hand to Terence, her lips smiling, but an odd expression in her eyes.

Terence stood stock still, not waving, but watching until he saw the last of that small, fluttering hand, those smiling lips. Then he said strangely:

"I've the queerest feeling that—that I've *lost* Deirdre! I wish I hadn't let her go alone—ass that I am!"

Olivia looked at him curiously. He looked rather pale, and his blue eyes were serious.

"Yes, you certainly *are* rather an ass," she said

briskly, piloting him towards the Rolls. "Now don't you go and get m-morbid ideas, Terry. 'Lost Deirdre,' indeed! You talk as if she was off to Honolulu instead of D-d-devon!"

Terence did not seem to hear her.

CHAPTER XII

BELONGING

I

Purse Pomeroy in the rain. . . .

It drove in stinging, blinding sheets over the sea and the heather-clad hills. Round the little cottage on the cliff road the wind moaned and howled like a living thing.

Deirdre stood at the window drumming restlessly on the pane. She had been indoors all day, and the narrow confines of the room were beginning to chafe her. The Sealyham was sitting on the window-seat watching the steady drip of rain that fell from a jutting cornice.

A high cart jolted past, drawn by a glistening white horse, the driver huddled up on the seat like a mere bundle of wet oilskin. Deirdre watched it out of sight, then looked across the grey, tossing waters of the estuary to the heather and bracken-covered hills, running right along the rocky coast, and the massive rocky head of the Lion which guarded the mouth of the estuary.

"I think I'll go out," she said aloud.

She turned away to find Mrs. Dean. The warm clean

smell of hot tough-cakes and currant cake told her that it was baking day. She found Mrs. Dean just drawing out a tray of tempting, golden-brown tough-cakes, her round face red and shining. She welcomed Deirdre warmly.

"Sit you down and have a warm tough-cake, Missie, du now. They'm rare good wi' a slap o' fresh butter."

Deirdre hesitated, looked at the tempting things and fell. Eating her tough-cake, she watched Mrs. Dean's round knobby little figure bustling round the red bricked floored kitchen.

"Isn't this a rotten day, Mrs. Dean?"

"Eh, dearie, well mun you say so! An' yesterday such a fine day, wi' th' sunshine an' arl——"

"Mrs. Dean, I think I'm going out—up the Lion."

"Goin' tu claime the Lion on a day like this? Eh, missie, yu'll be blown down, for sure!"

"Oh, no, I shan't! It will be lovely up there, and I've got a good mackintosh and heavy brogues. I'll be back to tea."

"Well, ah'll have a hot bath for yu when you come home," said Mrs. Dean comfortingly. "Yu'll be drenched, ah dessay. An' dry clothes laid out for you, dearie."

"Mrs. Dean, you're an angel! Good-bye, and the tough-cake was delicious!"

She went out of the kitchen on dancing feet, up the narrow stairs to her fresh little chintz-hung bedroom. Presently to Sam's great excitement, she came down in her mackintosh, carrying a stick, with a little black velvet hat crushed down over her hair.

"Wuff!" said Mr. Weller. She eyed him dubiously.

"If you come you'll get awfully wet and muddy, 'cause you've got such short legs that your tummy almost scrapes the ground, and then I'll have to get a tub of warm water in the scullery and bath you, and you'll have to dry before the kitchen fire."

Mr. Weller, overlooking the slighting reference to certain portions of his anatomy, said "Wuff!" again eagerly.

Deirdre laughed.

"Oh well, come on!" she said.

The Sealyham bounced off the window-seat and skurried after her, through the narrow little hall and out into the rain-drenched garden. Marguerites, salmon-pink gladioli, hollyhocks, and the big bush of pinky mauve hydrangeas by the gate, were all bowed down by the fierce rain. The wet gravel scrunched oozily beneath her feet.

Once out in the road they set off at a brisk pace towards the village. To the left of the road were here and there pretty houses, raised high above the road in beautiful gardens. Hydrangeas were everywhere, and fuchsias hung their wet scarlet and purple bells over the high grey walls. To the right was a low stone wall, beyond which the rocks shelved sheer down into the sea. Deirdre paused once, in spite of the buffeting of rain and wind, to stand by this wall and look at the view before her. The sea was very rough, and huge waves dashed themselves on to the rocks beneath her in clouds of feathery spray. Across the heaving grey waters of the estuary were the bracken-covered

slopes of hills, purple here and there with patches of sodden heather. There were no smooth golden sands in the little coves now, only big waves that broke with thunder and flying foam upon the towering, jagged grey rocks. The mouth of the estuary was guarded by two grim sentinels—on the right by the Mew Rock, wreathed in clinging drifts of mist, and the left by Lion head, lowering and massive against the pearl-grey sky. Beyond them, and the churning foam of the bar, was the open sea—a dreary expanse of dark greenish grey, until it merged on the horizon into the paleness of the sky.

Deirdre stood listening, her mood oddly fitting in with the storm, to the shriek of the wind, the roaring thunder of the sea, and the weird, hoarse laughter of the gulls that wheeled and dipped over the grey cliffs. The rain stung her lips, lashed her eyelids. She laughed a little, and, calling Mr. Weller, who was pensively sampling the grass at the gate of Westlands, swung on down the road. After turning a sharp corner they came to the village.

Purse Pomeroy was built on the side of a hill, sloping down to the harbour. The streets were all narrow, and linked up one with another by the means of flights of extraordinarily steep steps. The houses themselves were extremely quaint, built mostly of the grey stone one sees so much in Devon, against which the purple and scarlet of the habitual fuchsias looked very striking and artistic.

The village street was the pride of the neighbourhood. It consisted mainly of small shops and little

grey houses, with the Marine Hotel towering proudly by the harbour steps. The street was absurdly narrow, so much so that it was almost impossible for two cars to pass each other unless one went on the pavement. The event of the day was when the 'bus that brought people from Kingsbridge Station came lumbering over the cobbles. This vehicle, reputed to be built on the exact model of the Ark, took up practically the whole of the street.

One could be pretty sure that if the 'bus was lumbering down the street, and an ordinary car came in the other direction, there would be quite a pithy little exhibition of repartee between the conductor and driver of the 'bus, and the chauffeur of the car, when each would refer epigrammatically to the rules of the road, wonder piously "Wot the Ottymobile Association was abaht to let a great 'ulk like you tike up orl the street," and remark delicately upon the construction of each other's physiognomy.

On these occasions the whole of Purse Pomeroy turned out to watch and listen, offering consolation and advice to their particular favourites, or abuse to the other side. It usually ended in a victory for the station 'bus. The other car would be forced to back down the street and up a side alley, where it waited while the pantechnicon wreathed in glory and petrol fumes, lumbered leisurely past, to draw up with a grinding groan before the majestic entrance of the Marine Hotel.

To-day, however, this almost daily comedy was not in progress. The street was practically deserted, except

for one or two damp-looking shoppers, who pattered among the puddles wielding large umbrellas, or dived in and out of the shops like startled rabbits. A tall, broad-shouldered young fisherman, in sou'-wester and rubber wading-boots up to his thighs, came up the steps that led down to the quay, and strode across the road to the tiny public-house. Deirdre looked after him appreciatively. She had only been there four days, but she had seen all sorts of splendid types among the men on the quay or in the fishing-boats. This lad was a typical example, with his magnificent breadth of shoulder and length of limb. Deirdre thought reflectively that those must have been the sort of men who sailed with Drake and Frobisher and Hawkins Westward Ho, and who sent the Spanish cur cringing homeward with his tail between his legs. As she went down the slippery steps to the quay, she sang beneath her breath a snatch of triumphant song——

> "Pride of the West! What Devon hath kept
> Devon shall keep on tide or main;
> Call to the storm and drive them flying,
> Devon, O Devon, in wind and rain!"

Deirdre felt an absurd, warm little thrill of pride, as if Devon was her own county,—well, so it was! The spirit of Devon was the spirit of England, and England was *hers!* She walked, still humming, along the little jetty.

The harbour on a sunny day was a charming picture, with the white sails of the yachts, the russet and scarlet

sails of fishing-boats, reflected in the calm water. Even to-day, in the driving mist and rain, it had a certain beauty. All sorts of craft were moored there —tiny dinghies and skiffs, smart little launches, a great towering hulk in the background, a few beautiful yachts, glistening with spotless paint and bright brasses. The quaint little town, straggling up the hill-side, looked down upon the harbour, and on the other side of the estuary were the hills, green and purple with bracken and heather, or silver with oats and golden with corn. The only occupants of the jetty were the ferryman and a small yellow dog, who sat together under a sort of little corrugated iron shelter.

The ferryman was long of limb and broad of shoulder, his face reddened by the wind's buffeting, and tanned by the sun. He wore a dark blue jersey, a sou'-wester, and wading-boots up to the thighs. Little gold rings dangled from his ears, and a short, stubby, and evil black pipe was stuck in one corner of his mouth. His strong brown hands were very busy with the broken meshes of a net.

The small yellow dog gazed at Deirdre and Mr. Wellier with one yellow eye, and then, antipathy in his bearing, turned once more to study the landscape.

"Good afternoon," said Deirdre.

The ferryman put down the net, took out his pipe, and regarded her with gratified astonishment.

"D'yu warnt t' cross in the furry? Eh, Miss, ef yu ain't the only pusson wot 'as come along tu-day!" He looked at her congratulatingly. "Th' waater's very rough, Miss. 'Orrible waves!"

Deirdre looked out at the tossing water, and laughed like a little girl.

"I don't mind—I like it rough! I'm going to climb the Lion."

The ferryman got up with a grunt, put the net aside, and clumped down the slimy steps of the little jetty to where the clumsy ferry lay heaving on the water. He put a leg over the edge, got in, and gave her his hard brown hand.

"Sit down on th' left o' the furry, Missie, an' then yu woan't get s' much o' th' waaves."

Deirdre obeyed him, holding Mr. Weller tightly in her arms. The little yellow dog sat on the quay, and watched them indifferently with his one topaz eye. The man pushed off from the quay with a few strong strokes of the pole, then bent and started the engine. The whole boat vibrated with its chugging—He seized the tiller, swung it round, and they were off.

As they were crossing the estuary, the big waves caught them broadside on. They broke right over the boat, which lurched and rocked as if it were a canoe instead of a heavily built ferry-boat. The man at the tiller stood immovable, sucking at his stubby pipe. Mr. Weller disapproved of the whole thing. He wriggled in Deirdre's arms, and was opening his mouth to protest shrilly when a big wave splashed up over them both, wetting Deirdre's cheek and hair, and almost choking Mr. Weller.

He began to wish that he had stayed at home watching the rain drip from the cornice—Land again! Beautiful, slimy steps leading up out of this horrible,

tossing ocean! The man stopped the engine, and as they floated in, the Sealyham wrenched himself free, and bounded over the narrow strip of water on to terra firma, just escaping slipping on the wet stone and hurtling into quite a foot of slimy water.

Deirdre took out her purse, and instead of the usual penny, gave him half-a-crown.

"It was worth it!" she laughed. "I simply loved the waves!"

The ferryman blinked rapidly at the half-a-crown, put it into his pocket, and broke into a broad grin.

"Thaank'ee, Missie, I'm shore! Yu be the first young laidy wot 'as said that she loved the waaves! Moast females 'ang on to the side o' the furry, an' 'oller when a waave comes over thim!" He helped her out carefully. "Did yu saay that yu was a-thinkin' o' climbin' th' Lion?"

"Yes, I'm going to have a try at it!"

"Waal, yu'll be bloown down or drenched, f' sutten!" said the Hopeful One cheerfully. "Mighty powerful breeze up th' Lion!"

Deirdre laughed at him.

"Well, if I'm not blown down I shall be back again at about five. Will you be able to hear me if I call?"

"Oh, ay, I'll 'ear you raight enough, Missie!" said the ferryman. "Goo'-day, Missie!"

"Good-day," she said, and paused in mounting the steep little path to the road to watch the ferry-boat racing back through the waves.

Mr. Weller was waiting for her in the narrow little lane, having now completely regained his *sang-froid*.

Together they set off, swinging down the muddy path between the high banks. Beyond the left-hand bank was a steep hill, densely covered with green bracken. Beyond the right hedge were pine trees, and then the jagged grey cliffs, shelving down to the little coves and bays, where the sea was booming against the rocks.

For some time they kept on down this narrow lane, then passing through a white gate, took a little foot-path that struck along the cliff, between seas of wet bracken and heather. They had passed the Bar now, and instead of the estuary there was the open sea, with the coastal hills stretching as far as the eye could see.

Deirdre paused and looked back at the little village huddled on the opposite hills, and Cliff Cottage, like a minute toy house, in the distance. She stood still for some minutes. It was so unutterably *alone* up there. The seas of heather and glistening bracken, the jagged teeth of the cliffs against which the waves dashed their flying spray. All was silent except for the restless moaning of the Bar, and the strange, almost uncanny gurgling sigh that the sea made in a cave in the rocks. The sea-mews startled her for a moment with their hoarse, chuckling laughter. She remembered something that Mrs. Dean had said—that the gulls were the souls of drowned mariners, come back to the open spaces and tossing waters that they loved. She shivered a little. There was something weird and melancholy in their harsh cry.

"Come on, Sam!" she called to Mr. Weller, who was

sniffing a clump of mauve-starred wild geranium. "This is where we start to climb!"

She struck off the little footpath, wading among the wet bracken, the sodden glory of the heather. Her face was wet and whipped to a warm rosiness, her lips were glistening, her hair, her eyes. She felt suddenly fey—as if the sting of the rain, the buffeting of wind, and the lonely beauty of the moor, had gone to her head like rare old wine. . . .

> "What's left behind I may not find,
> The splendour and the pain;
> The splash of sun, the shouting wind,
> And the brave sting of rain,
> I may not meet again."

She found herself singing these words, in a sort of triumphant chant.

"The brave sting of rain—the brave—sting—of—rain!"

It changed to the lilting, rousing tune of——

"Devon, O Devon, in wind and rain!"

Deirdre stopped singing to look round for Mr. Weller.

"Sammy! Come on, Sam!"

He was not to be seen.

In a few seconds, however, with a grunt and a splutter, he emerged from a jungle of bracken, shaking the wet from his coat. The Sealyham's gameness was undaunted, but his legs, alas, were short. The dense bracken and heather met over his head like a primeval jungle. Deirdre burst out laughing.

"Poor old man! Shall I carry you for a bit?"

Mr. Weller gave his answer by disappearing once more, with an ecstatic "Wuff!" into a positive sea of wine-scarlet heather. He was having the time of his life. Deirdre, too, was enjoying herself. The rain was in her eyes, and climbing was slow owing to the strong wind, but she wanted to sing, to dance with tossing arms and laughing mouth to the piping of the wind—faster and faster, a wild death dance, a mad Bacchanale——

She began to sing again——

> "Battle and storm and the sea dog's way!
> Drake from his long rest turned again,
> Victory lit thy steel with lightning,
> Devon, O Devon, in wind and rain!"

She was on the top of the Lion, standing on his massive, rocky head, looking down at the view beneath her——

"Devon, O Devon, in wind and rain!"——

The sea looked grey and misty, with white horses riding the waves. Mist hung over the coastal hills and blotted out the looming shoulder of the Mew Rock. A long way off she could see Start Point, and the waves breaking with booming thunder in the little bay of Gara Rock. The brown sails of a fishing-boat moved slowly round the point—it looked like a dead leaf tossed on the water by a careless hand——

"Devon, O Devon, in wind and rain!"——

The rain drove into Deirdre's face, almost blinding

her, and she could hardly stand for the buffeting of the wind. The Sealyham was sitting on a small flat rock, the breeze lifting his ears in a comical way.

Up on the Lion's rocky head, it was all so lonely and grand. The rocks, the heather, the bracken, gave one the impression of having been there a very, very long time, under the sky that seemed so near,—since the beginning of all things it had crouched there with its face to the sea, while the centuries blended and blurred into the mezzotint that men call Time. . . .

Very suddenly Deirdre thought of Guy. At that minute she wanted him desperately—wanted to feel his warm hand on hers, his life, his nearness. Everything was so old up here—so old, and cold, and lonely. She wanted Youth—and Guy was Youth. She spoke his name under her breath, as if miles away he would hear her, and come.

"Guy. . . ."

She heard the restless soughing and moaning of the sea, the hoarse screaming of the gulls. Then the Sealyham moved, and growled.

Deirdre turned sharply.

Standing with his back to a rock, looking at her, was Guy Wyndham.

They stood for a minute staring, and then Deirdre took a little, uncertain, stumbling step forward——

Suddenly their arms were about each other . . .

II

Then they stood looking at each other, entirely and blissfully oblivious of the rain and wind.

"How did you know I was here?" asked Deirdre suddenly.

"I met Dahlia Wycome—she told me—only after a lot of argument and searching cross questions. I *had* to see you again, Deirdre. I knew that if I wrote you wouldn't answer, so I just came. I—I'll go at once if you don't want me."

Deirdre looked at him with miserable eyes.

"You *know* I want you, but—oh, Guy, you shouldn't have come! It only makes it harder for us both, and the outcome will be the same."

"I tried to keep away—on my word of honour I tried, after getting your letter. Then—oh, heavens! I couldn't stick it any longer—it almost—killed me. I just *had* to see you once more. We parted so casually —you never told me that it was to be our last meeting. It was impossible to keep away any longer——"

Deirdre noticed with incredible minuteness, while he was speaking, how he had changed in a week or two. He looked older, in some subtle way—there were dark rings under his eyes—his whole face seemed to have sharpened and aged. Guy, the handsome, impulsive boy, had vanished, never fully to return in all his undimmed joy and ardour. In his place stood Guy, the man, welded and fashioned into shape on the anvil of suffering, passed through the fire and coming out proved and unscathed.

Deirdre felt a vast tenderness as she looked at him. She said softly—"Guy, why did you come?"

"I wanted to know if what you said was final. Must we never see each other again? Surely we can be

friends, as we have always been? What disloyalty to Terry is there in that?"

"None, but the world will think there is. And if Terry heard anything, as he would be bound to do, it would hurt him so."

Guy flushed all over his dark-skinned face, and muttered something under his breath.

"Yes, I know they're beasts," said Deirdre gently. "But there it is. I'd burn my boats, and snap my fingers in the face of all the world, if it wasn't for—Terence."

Guy said nothing—he was apparently intently watching the brown-sailed fishing-boat as it vanished up the estuary—so Deirdre went on, a little quiver breaking up her voice, in spite of herself.

"It's very hard to be brave, I think, Guy. Harder still to be—unselfish."

Still Guy was silent. Deirdre set her teeth, forced her lips into steadiness, and managed to speak naturally.

"Are you staying here?"

"Only for the night, at the Drake Arms."

"How did you know I was up on the Lion?"

"I went to Cliff Cottage about ten minutes after you'd gone. Mrs. Dean told me where you were."

"You've been following me, then, all the way?"

"Yes."

Guy suddenly wheeled round on her and held out his hand.

"I'm going now, Deirdre."

"Going?"

"Yes—I—I can't stick it any longer." He tried to say something, failed, and without even a "Good-bye," walking as if he was blind, started stumblingly to go down the hill.

Deirdre watched him for a minute, dumbly. She saw him trip among the bracken, right himself, go blindly on. Mr. Weller leapt after him, barking with glee. He was going out of her life now—for ever.

Deirdre felt sudden sick panic. She called sharply —"Guy! Guy—stop!"

She came running after him, clung to him, kissed him——

"I can't let you go—I can't—can't let you go!"

She stood back and looked up at him with shining eyes.

"Guy, let us take this month as our own! Don't go back to London—stay here. We can be with each other all day—for one glorious month. Then at the end of it—you go to Venice—I go back to Terry. But we'll have had our month together!"

Guy shook his head.

"It wouldn't be fair to Terry."

"Oh!" said Deirdre impatiently. "Terry—Terry! How can it hurt him? He'll never know. Besides, even if he did, he wouldn't grudge us one little month. He's going to have a lifetime of me—you're going to have nothing. For this month I'm Deirdre Bellamy —you're Guy Wyndham. We're engaged to be married. There is no such person as Terence Liscarney in the world—only you and me!"

For a minute eagerness leapt into the boy's eyes. But still he hesitated.

"The people down here know you're married, though."

"They don't!" said Deirdre triumphantly. She held up a ringless left hand. "I took my ring off—they all know me only as Miss Bellamy. I didn't want them to know who I was."

"If people got to hear of it——"

"They won't—no one comes to unfashionable sleepy little Purse Pomeroy. There is no fear of *that.*" She put her hands on his shoulders, and smiled up into his eyes. "Guy, dearest, let us take this largesse of the gods while we can. At the end of the month we say good-bye for ever. Let us have one happy memory to look back on afterwards. We've never been happy together, have we, Guy?—only for that one little week in Gilly's Wood. Let's be happy together for once—do what we like, love as much as we like, and be happy—happy! It's the only chance we'll ever have again——"

Guy hesitated no longer. . . .

Mr. Weller sat watching them, stumpy forelegs well apart. He was thinking longingly of a warm fire—a saucerful of tea, perhaps—a tough-cake. . . .

"Wuff!" said Sam plaintively.

Guy started, and laughed.

"Heavens, I clean forgot! Dear, do you know that it's raining—pouring?" He touched her coat, her hair, her cheek. "Sweetheart, you're drenched! Come on—let's go home, and you shall ask me to tea."

Hand in hand they passed down the hill. . . .

Along the bracken-clothed cliffs again, and in the ferry racing over the tossing estuary. Side by side they went up the slippery steps into the deserted village street. The rain was gradually stopping, and a patch of blue sky was actually peeping out from beneath a grey storm cloud, like a brave doublet under a ragged mantle. The earth smelt fresh and sweet after the rain—even the fuchsias and hydrangeas seemed to lift up their heads and take on a new lease of brilliant colour. A country cart rattled past, drawn by a sturdy little pony. The driver threw them a cheerful "Gude day! Lukes laike clearin' oop, eh?" as he passed them.

"Splendid people, Devon folk," said Guy in a sudden burst of praise.

Just as they neared Cliff Cottage Deirdre spoke rather hesitatingly.

"Guy, dear, I shall tell Mrs. Dean that you're my fiancé. Then it won't seem strange if we go about together a lot. The etiquette in these places seems to be that you can go anywhere with the man you're engaged to, with 'puffect propriety' as Hobbs would say. So, although I hate deceiving her, that's what we'd better do."

And that is what they did.

Mrs. Dean received the stranger with cordial surprise and many "did you evers?" and after divesting Guy of his soaking shoes and mackintosh, lending him a pair of her husband's carpet slippers, sat them both down to a right royal tea, which included little golden-

brown tough-cakes, thick cloudy amber moor honey, smelling of heather and clover, fragrant spice cake, a blue dish of raspberries, and a little brown bowl of thick yellow Devonshire cream.

Their chairs were very close together—so close that their arms touched. Heaven seemed to be in the little room. The clock on the mantelshelf between the two simpering shepherdesses ticked in a deep guttural purr. Outside a bird in the garden started to sing after the rain—a run or two, elfin clear, a delicate shake and trill, then one long, mellow, golden pipe, repeated several times over. On the tea-table was a bowl of large sweet peas, wine purple, flame pink, and a deep cream, stained and frilled with rose. They could hear the soughing of the sea, the distant screaming of gulls. Now and again a cart rattled past, or a motor slid with a squelchy purr along the muddy road——

Heaven was in the little room, and all the rest of the world shut out. . . .

And so began their month of happiness.

CHAPTER XIII

HAPPINESS

I

HAPPINESS. . . .

It is not many who can with truth lay claim to having run the whole wide gamut of this most fleeting emotion, but in that one golden month Deirdre and Guy tasted the cup of happiness down to its last dregs.

That one golden month. . . .

Afterwards Deirdre, looking back on it, thought that it had gone with incredible speed and yet seemed to embrace an eternity—a lifetime of Love and Youth and Laughter. They were happy, those two, laughing away their careless days. The question was—not what to do, but how they could manage to pack everything into the short time they had at Purse Pomeroy.

Such days August gave them—days of lapis lazuli and gold, when the coastal hills, shimmering in a haze of heat, seemed on fire with the heather's passionate flame, when hardly a ripple stirred the sparkling peacock blue surface of the sea, and not a breath of wind bellied the russet and scarlet sails of the fishing-smacks.

Most of those days they lazed away, diving and floating and splashing about in the sunwarm water,

lying on the golden sand of the little coves "soaking in the sun," and acquiring the golden tan that Deirdre was so proud of.

One morning they got up early, and meeting each other in the cliff road, walked through the gold and blue of the early morning down to the ferry, got the little dinghy, and went mackereling. Deirdre wore a pair of breeches, pilfered from Howard, a boyish jersey with the sleeves rolled high above the elbow, and all her hair pushed up under an old felt hat.

Guy had seen her in many beautiful dresses, but never in his life had he loved her more than in the garb of a boy. He loved every bit of her then—her strong, rounded young arms, faintly tanned, her narrow feet in their sturdy brogues, the very audacious tilt of that old felt hat over her laughing eyes.

The "boyish" side of Deirdre was much in evidence in those days. She it was who dived and raced with Guy, who climbed the rocks with him, jumping with a cat-like sureness from peak to peak in a fashion conducive to heart failure, who drove the little cream-coloured car along the narrow lanes at a reckless pace which called down showers of reproof and censure from Guy upon her head.

Guy loved this side of Deirdre. She had never seemed so young as she did then—it might have been Olivia who swaggered about in her whipcord breeches and old Jersey, or ran barefoot over the sands in her short, straight gingham gowns.

One day they hired two horses from a farmer—moor horses, wild, unbroken young things, and rode

them one morning early over the golf links. The course was crossed by low stone walls, like the fields in Ireland, and at these they set their horses, laughing and shouting like a couple of schoolboys. Deirdre was perfectly reckless—her horse was a nervy, bad-tempered grey, with a rolling eye and a wicked mouth, and several times Guy had his heart in his mouth, and he watched her take the wall like a bird, the hoofs of the grey not even stirring a loose stone. He felt an exquisite pride in her daring, and in the perfect way she handled the horse. How he loved the hoyden Deirdre, with her gay, clear laugh, her supple young strength!

That one golden month. . . .

II

One day they walked to Cherrystone, a little village a few miles away. It was a glorious afternoon, intensely hot and windless, with the sea shimmering like a stretch of jewelled satin, and the sky a deep, cloudless delphinium blue.

The lane they were following was typically Devon, narrow, and sunk between high banks. Presently it left off following the winding estuary up to Poole, and branched off between fields and woods, where an ancient finger-post, wreathed with the green ribands of ivy, pointed the traveller on to Cherrystone. As yet the hand of the hedge cutter had not shorn the flowing tresses of leaf and bloom that trailed the steep banks, and delicate traceries of purple vetch, yellow colt's-foot, the flower of the wild strawberry, ladies'

lace, bright and blue borage, and mauve wild mint, warmly fragrant in the sunshine, made a brave show of colour and perfume. Here and there were patches of scarlet pimpernels and tiny speedwells, pink and white rest-harrow, smelling of sweet almonds, the gay tatters of ragged robin, scarlet and white campions, the orange-tipped gold of ladies'-slippers, and the tiny rosy star of wild geranium. All this pageant of bloom was over-hung by showers of ferns, narrow shiny hart's tongues, or the ordinary variety, and tall spires of foxgloves, their rosy lavender bells speckled with golden brown markings. Above these nodding in the hedge, were festoons of honeysuckle, their rose spurred trumpets shading from dead white tinged with pink to a deep cream, almost a yellow. Twined with them were sprays of bramble, heavy with luscious black fruit, the unripe berries standing out like rubies and emeralds among jet. Now and again came a hanging shower of traveller's-joy, green leaves and ragged rosettes of nuts, as yet unripe, with here and there the last lingering glory of June's darling, the wild rose, and the orange and scarlet jewels of straggling briony.

It was very hot, and they were glad when they came to a fresh water spring—a clear, sparkling trickle of water gushing out among the ferns, and the Sealyham drank long and loudly at it, and Deirdre and Guy made cups of their hands and drank too.

Deirdre looked at him over the rosy goblet of her soft palms.

The tired, haggard look had passed—he had regained his perfect physical condition again. His skin

was tanned by sun and wind, his eyes were bright and clear. Deirdre felt an exquisite pride as she looked at him, and then a stab of sharp misery. In such a short time he would be gone. . . .

Guy turned and saw the expression on her face. He put his arm round her.

"Happy, Dear?"

She tried to lie bravely, failed, and said miserably—"No."

There was silence for a minute. Then Deirdre looked up at him, as if to read something in his face.

"Are *you* happy, Guy?"

His arm dropped from her shoulders. He turned away, and, while apparently intent upon a clump of blue borage, flung furiously over his shoulders

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"How can I be?"

Deirdre smiled a little in spite of herself. He seemed so young in his flushed anger—so piteously young. He went on in a strange, muffled voice.

"What's the use of playing, and laughing, and pretending we're happy when we're not? How can we be really happy with the knowledge that in a few weeks it must end? Deirdre, it's a sheer impossibility—we ought never to have tried it——"

"It was my fault," said Deirdre miserably—"All my fault. But I did so want to—to be happy, even for this little while."

Quickly Guy's anger had passed.

"You shall be," he said reassuringly, tenderly—"We'll try and forget that it is going to end—try and

forget even Terry for these few weeks. I can't bear to think of you unhappy, Dear. It hurts even worse than the thought of leaving you."

A cloud seemed to have come over the sun. The two in the lane looked at each other mutely, with brave eyes. Then Deirdre with an effort rallied her gaiety. She started to talk a little too vivaciously.

"Wheres the dog? Sam, Sam! Oh, there you are, you wicked scrap! Oh, do look at that field, Guy! Isn't it the loveliest colour?"

She pointed to a ploughed field, the furrows of which were a deep cornelian red. It stretched right up a gently sloping hillside, and on the crest of the hill a man driving a plough was silhouetted. Man, plough, and the superb lines of the straining horses were sharply dark against the blue of the sky. They looked almost grotesquely out of proportion on the sky-line, as if they were poised on the edge of the world. The deep red of the soil, the intense delphinium blue of the sky, and the leafy green hedges, made a vivid and arresting picture.

"And there are the pink sheep!" cried Deirdre. "Oh dear, how I do love Devon! Everything in it's so different to other countries, from its cream to its sheep! Don't those look somehow comical?"

She started to laugh at the rosy bundles of wool that browsed the sweet grass of the next field. They looked absurdly like giant flowers starring the jade-green turf. There was a small grey donkey grazing quite contentedly among them, like a Jew among the Gentiles. As they passed, he lifted up his head and

trumpeted loudly, and with a curious vibrating timbre, to Mr. Weller's great excitement.

They were going down the steep lane that led into Cherrystone, when they met a long string of cattle coming up it, driven by the farmer on horseback.

He shouted to them in the soft, slurring Devon drawl:

"Du yu mainde staandin' t' th' saide o' the rooad, zur, for a minute? Them'll be paast vury soon! Coome-up, Moll! Tck! tck!"

Guy collared Mr. Weller, and they stood watching the long cavalcade pass, the sun glistening on the beasts' reddish-brown skins. Last of all came the farmer, lightly flicking a hazel switch, his beaming face hot and glistening with perspiration under his battered hat, like a round scarlet moon.

"Thaank yu, zur! Thaank you, marm!" He touched the battered hat. "Very waarm tu-day! Whoa there, Buttercup! Hola, Bet! Tck! tck!"

He and his long procession turned up a branching-off lane, dim and leafy. Deirdre and Guy went on down to Cherrystone.

Opposite the stumpy little grey church was a little ivied farm-house, where the farmer's wife, a handsome woman in a fresh print gown, welcomed them with a charming courtesy that would have done credit to a French marquise. They had tea in a cool little dining-room, which, however, they would have willingly given up for the pleasure of eating a meal in the big red-tiled kitchen.

Outside in the farmyard they were marking the

sheep. One by one a farm-hand let them out of the pen, where they were held by another lad while the farmer stamped them himself with his initial, marking it on the short clipped wool in some kind of pitch. Once they were marked, the sheep roamed aimlessly about the cobbled farmyard, zealously watched by two collie dogs and an old liver-coloured spaniel. Deirdre and Guy watched them with interest, Mr. Weller, fortified by the rare treat of a saucer of tea, with a huge excitement. There was a jar of dahlias on the table —great spiked blooms of velvety flame-scarlet and pure, clear yellow. They came out of the little flower garden in front of the house, with its rows of demure pansies, and salmon-pink gladioli.

The three of them went and sat in a flower-filled meadow for the rest of the long golden afternoon. They were gay—laboriously gay. Deirdre sang, and Guy wove a wreath of blue scabious to crown her hair. Mr. Weller distinguished himself by getting stuck in a rabbit hole, and having to be pulled out by his hind legs. They walked home to Purse Pomeroy through the woods, when a nightingale was singing in snatches and bursts of rapturous melody, and the lime trees were flooding the tremendous twilight with sweetness. And between them walked a shadowy figure, with a sleek fair head set on broad shoulders, who looked at them with Terence's gay blue eyes, who laughed at them with Terence's wide, humorous mouth. Both of them were aware of his presence, and happiness, that most elusive and fragile of fabrics, was shattered for them that day.

III

That was only one day, though, in a chain of happiness. They reminded Deirdre of a row of perfect pearls, slipping one by one on the golden thread of time. After that one incident when they had both admitted the misery which was hidden beneath the glittering gauze of their laughter, they had not mentioned it again. Both Deirdre and Guy seemed to thrust the mere thought resolutely behind them, dragging happiness over it to hide its grim horrors. Even if they were aware of the lurking terror, neither of them referred to it again.

"Let's play this month away!" was Deirdre's cry. So they played, like two children in the sunshine, heedless of the past or the future, but living with a glorious confidence in the blissfully happy present.

The month slipped away on dancing feet—there came the last fortnight—the last week—the last day.

They explored all the leafy lanes and sleepy villages of South Devon. They motored to Dartmouth, where they went up the Dart in a hired launch to Totnes. Deirdre loved the tranquil sheet of water, looking like a coat of shimmering silver mail in the sunshine, that wound its broad ribbon so peacefully between its "high woods, heron-haunted.

For the most part, however, they stayed at Purse Pomeroy, leading a Lotus-eater's existence, lazing on the sands, bathing twice and sometimes three times a day, going after pollock and mackerel in the little dinghy, rambling along the leafy lanes, and taking picnics to Gara Rock or Splat Cove. As Deirdre said

they "made up in a month for all the happiness they had missed in a lifetime."

But the month went, as all happy times do go, too quickly.

Came the last week—the last day but one——

They went to Dartmeet in a little car which Guy hired at the local garage. Because it was one of their last days, Deirdre was vividly gay—beautiful with the fierce, leaping beauty of a flame. Her gaiety hurt Guy somehow. He was reminded of that night at the Dower House when she had sung those airy French chansons, and said brilliant things with a laughing mouth and misery in her eyes. Then, as now, there had been something hard and forced in her vivacity—it was all as unreal and glittering as a tinsel domino thrown over a drab gown. Over the moor road the little car sped on through the sunshine. The moor lay splendid and lonely, stretching as far as the eye could see. Over its swelling contours the heather had flung its rose-red cloak, the fading bracken had tossed a royal mantle of purplish-brown and henna-red and burnt orange. Rearing rocky heads out of the sea of flaming heather were the tors, grim and dark against a delphinium sky.

The little car kept along the road that stretched like a ribbon over the moors, occasionally dipping down into narrow sunken lanes, fringed with pine and beech, where solitary grey stone cottages nestled among the trees, surrounded by thick hedges of dangling scarlet and purple fuchsias.

For the time Deirdre was genuinely happy. The

beauty of it all laid a gentle hand on the turmoil of her thoughts. Guy turned once to find her looking at him with love in her eyes.

"Darling——"

"D'you love me?" he asked, for the sheer pleasure of hearing her answer:

"You know I do."

They looked at each other for a minute, then swiftly away. The same thought had come to both. Words were mingling with the throb of the engines——

"One day more—one—one day—one—day—more——"

Quite near them a lark rose, and soared up, up, into the blueness, shaking a torrent of sweet, twittering notes. Higher and higher it soared, was lost and merged into the blue vault of the sky, but still its clear, shrill trillings floated down to them, like the far-off phantom melody of faunish piping. . . .

"I should like to be a lark," said Deirdre. "It must feel lovely up there with only blue sky round them, and the moor underneath."

She paused to restrain Mr. Weller, who had seen a rabbit scurry over the road, and was panting to leap out of the car in hot pursuit.

Then she went on, looking thoughtfully at the jagged grey head of Beck Tor, over which a sparrow-hawk, a mere speck in the blue, hovered motionless, suspended between heaven and earth.

"How I love the moors! It seems funny to think that in a few days I shall have left it all behind for London."

The sparrow-hawk swooped suddenly, dropping like a stone, and was lost to sight. . . .

"And you?" said the girl, turning to watch his face. "Where will you be in a few days?"

"At my villa in Venice."

"Venice . . ." She was thinking of Venice by moonlight, a dream city of ivory and pearls, aquamarine shadows drifting over the lagoons, tower and dome and spire standing out like pale silhouettes against a dusky sapphire sky.

"'A villa in Venice'—that sounds very grand, I know! In reality it's a small place, picturesque and as spick and span as a doll's house. The garden's the best part of it, though—full of nimosa and pink oleanders and dark cypresses against a very blue sky."

"It sounds—heavenly," said Deirdre in a very low voice. She was almost frightened at the pang of fierce longing which went through her at his words. Longing for that Venetian garden, and love which would never end, golden days which would never break their glorious chain. . . . It would be so easy. . . . For the first time Deirdre knew the siren call of temptation. She shook it off in a minute, but the evil memory of it remained, like the dark blot of a vulture's wings among the apple-blossom of a Sussex orchard.

The little car sped onward over the moors. Once they passed a little brown stream chuckling and slipping beneath a low stone bridge. Butterflies fluttered over the heather, tiny blue things powdered with silver dust, now and then a gorgeous Peacock or Red

Admiral, flaunting the orange, scarlet, and black splashed velvet of their wings. A little vagrant moor wind blew in their faces, bringing with it the hot scent of the heather, the warm, nutty sweetness of the gorse that spilt its blazing faerie gold among twisted thorn bushes in the hollow. The never ending pageant of the moor wore on, trailing its brave panoply of wine-scarlet heather and henna-tinted bracken.

They got to Dartmeet at lunch time, going through the tiny village and pulling up on the grass by the stone bridge that spans the Dart. The river was chuckling and singing beneath, crossed a few yards down by a clapper bridge. Deirdre stood on this bridge, looking down at the dancing water. Presently she ran back, the Sealyham barking at her heels, to the car.

"Oh, Guy, it's lovely!"

"Wait till you've seen it further down! Come on, let's go."

The three of them crossed the road, and walked along the side of the Dart. At first Deirdre gave little stammering exclamations—presently she was reduced to incoherent ecstasy. She had seen all the things that are supposed to be the most beautiful in the world. Yet never in her life had she experienced the feeling of sheer rapture that gripped her by the throat at the sight of the Dart, running and leaping and chuckling under its clapper bridge——

Ah, that little river, singing its immortal song as it slithed over the smooth, shining brown stones, tumbling over the salmon leaps in laughter of flying spray! The colour of it was in itself a thing of beauty—a

deep, tawny brown that was clouded amber in the sunlight, and dark orange in the shadows, so clear that you could see the stones at the bottom. It went singing on, singing on, swirling round the smooth, glistening humped brown stones and boulders, leaping over some in a little flurry of laughter, chuckling as it disturbed the quiet surface of some sleeping amber pool with mischievous eddying whirls and ripples. Such a gay, laughing little river, the Dart! It seemed never to glide in calm majesty, but always to run and leap and laugh, hurrying along in a delicious babbling scurry, chuckling under the clapper bridge, singing, singing, over the smooth wet stones. On one side was a steep bank clothed in whortleberry bushes, crowned with deep woods, and further along a bare shoulder of rose-stained moor. To the left were more trees, lichened rocks and frowning boulders that leant over the water as if guarding like benign sentinels their dancing child, the Dart. Quite near them a fish leapt, leaving rapidly widening circles after it. On and on hurried the little river, skipping the salmon leaps with a flurry and a cascade of laughter, murmuring to itself, humming an endless little song of summer skies and birds and flowers, chuckling, whispering, singing, singing over the glistening brown stones. . . .

Presently Deirdre sighed and smiled. "The Dart makes me feel a little sad, I think."

"Why?"

"It's too beautiful, and when things are too beautiful they always hurt."

She bent and put her arms round him—he was

squatting on his heels dabbling a hazel switch in the water.

"When I think of the Dart, darling, I shall think of you. You're both so vividly alive and young, somehow. Neither of you will ever grow old. The Dart laughs all the time—its such a gay, mischievous little river—and *you* used to laugh a lot, Guy—until —until lately."

"Don't I laugh a lot lately?" he asked, dropping the switch and looking up into her face.

There was a small pause, then——"No," said Deirdre, very low. Her eyes were tragic, although her mouth was folded bravely into steadiness.

Then she flung out her arms, and laughed.

"But we will to-day, Guy! We'll be gay to-day, and laugh a lot, and forget everyone in the world except ourselves! I feel fey—absolutely fey! I'm not going to give myself time to think! I'm going to laugh—laugh!"

She threw back her head, and made the glen peal with ghostly laughter. Then she started to dance, like a mad thing, like a ribbon of flame, by the side of the laughing river which went singing, singing over the smooth stones. . . .

For the rest of the afternoon they played like two happy, careless children, though for both of them words were mingling in with the chuckling song of the Dart.

"One day more—one day—one—one—day more——"

And to Deirdre another voice was singing—the soft, seductive voice of the siren.

IV

On that very day, many miles away from Purse Pomeroy, Terence Liscarney was walking down the yew alley in the Dower House garden. He had only arrived home from Deauville with the Wycomes the day before, and, looking very brown and fit, had run down to Greyfriars to see how things were getting on. Wheatcock had informed him that the Dowager was in the rose-garden, so Terence went out to find her. It was about six o'clock on a perfect August afternoon. The intense heat of the noon had given place to the refreshing coolness of approaching twilight. The thrushes were singing from the orchard as he passed the white wicket—a lad was mowing the long grass round the apple trees, the even stroke of his scythe making a pleasant swishing whisper. In the flower-beds delphiniums raised tall blue spires, poppies blazed in patches of scarlet flame, roses were everywhere. In the rose-garden, with its winding walks, they foamed over lattices, clambered up trellised archways—great bushes of York and Lancaster, Maiden's Blush, the old-fashioned damask, scented sweet-briar, and the nodding pink heads of Dorothy Perkins.

The Dowager, in a faded green jumper, a short tweed skirt, and battered straw hat, was standing by a lattice of tea roses cutting blooms to fill the flat-bottomed rush basket on her arm. When she saw her son coming down the path with a setter galumphing at his heels, she put down the basket with much precision, and went to meet him.

"My dear boy, you look very well!" she said in her

hearty voice, her thin lips smiling, her eyes perfectly expressionless.

"Yes, I'm awfully fit, Mater, thanks. Don't you admire my sunburn? I'm awfully bucked with it!"

He picked up the scissors from her basket, and cut an opening flower that nodded above his tall head.

"By gad, what thorns!" he said ruefully, sucking his brown finger.

The Dowager watched him with unmoved eyes. She meant this evening to play her carefully hoarded ace of trumps, and, although she knew what it would mean to the son she loved, no compunction stirred her. There was something terribly ruthless about the cold eyes, the hard mouth. Hate, long smouldering in her, had absolutely swamped all pity or compunction. She did not care who she hurt as long as the object of that smouldering hate was ruined. Spartan in her ruthlessness, she meant to strike the blow at Deirdre which was to fell her to the ground. If Terence got hurt too, it could not be helped. Terribly ruthless, hard and cold as granite, that woman as she stood there, watching, biding her time.

She took the scissors from her son, and cut some more roses. Terence started to tell her about Deauville, the Wycomes, the people he had met there. He leant against a post of the pergola and lit a cigarette, smiling at her through the blue haze.

The Dowager selected a rose, snipped it carefully, pulled off the thorns, and laid it among its brethren in the basket before asking the question. Then she said in a casual voice——

"And your wife, Terence?"

She watched him under her pale lashes while apparently brushing a tiny shimmering insect off a pale yellow bud.

"Deirdre? She's in Devon, you know, taking a rest cure. I shall have to let her know I'm back."

"Have you heard from her lately?"

"No, Mater, didn't I tell you? She didn't write to me and I didn't write to her—she wanted to just laze and not be bothered answering my scrawls. At first I felt rather worried about her, but Dahlia says that this Mrs. Bishop or Canon or Dean, or whatever her name is, is a sort of angel without wings, and will take care of Deirdre."

The Dowager looked at her son rather strangely.

"You are sure she is all right?"

Terence stared at her.

"My dear Mater, of course! She would have let me know if she wasn't! She'll be back in a few days, I expect, and then we'll be in town until November, I suppose—of course, it's just how Deirdre decides." He suddenly and boyishly grinned. "I've got a surprise for her—a set of chinchilla. Saw them in Paris, and I thought how ripping she'd look snuggled up in their silvery grey, with her green eyes and topping hair. D'you think she'll like 'em?"

"I have no doubt," said the Dowager woodenly, "that she will."

"Well, that's all right, then." Terence heaved a sigh of relief. "Mater, you've got a topping show of Canterbury bells just by the orchard—never saw

such whackers. Hobbs must be perfectly green with envy."

The Dowager steeled herself. For a minute she had had a poignant vision of Terence as a tiny boy, riding by the side of his father's hunter on a shaggy Shetland pony no bigger than a good-sized Newfoundland—Terry at public school, winning half the events on Sports' day, big and fair in white vest and shorts—Terry before Deirdre had come into his life, stealing his heart, blinding his eyes to all others——

That sudden softening, those fleeting, tender memories, gave place to a vision of a girl with green eyes and a disdainful mouth—the usurper, who had driven her out of her place as mistress of Greyfriars, out of her place in Terry's heart. Swiftly surging to draw armour over that momentary softness, flooded the bitter waters of hate. The Dowager turned to snip a blood-red rose on the opposite trellis. Quite casually she flung a question over her shoulder—

"And your friend, Guy Wyndham?"

"Jingle? He's gone away for a month's holiday to rest after all his writing. I must ring him up tomorrow and see if he's back."

"Where has he gone to?"

"I don't know—I asked Deirdre, but she didn't know either. The lad seems to have just bunked without leaving an address—probably to Italy. Or to Wales perhaps—I know he was always raving about the fishing there."

The Dowager, very busy stripping the red rose of thorns, said in a curious voice——

"I can tell you where he is!"

"*You* can! Did he tell you, then? That's funny —telling you and not telling me!"

"He did not tell me."

"How do you know then? Where is he?"

The Dowager suddenly dropped the rose and swung round, all her hate and pent-up venom vibrating in her voice——

"He is down at Purse Pomeroy with—your wife!"

The ash on Terence's cigarette had grown long—mechanically he flicked it off. He seemed not to fully take in the meaning of the words, but repeated them stupidly——

"Down at Purse Pomeroy with—my wife!"

The Dowager laughed on a cracked note.

"Don't you understand? Oh, you fool, you fool! It has been going on for months, and you've never seen——!"

Quite suddenly Terence understood. A furious red ran up under his tanned skin—sheer leaping murder blazed in the blue eyes. Yet when he spoke his voice was quite soft and steady, although it was somehow rather terrible.

"It's a lie!" he said—"It's a damned lie!"

The dowager felt almost frightened at this new Terence who stood confronting her. A minute ago he had been a laughing-eyed, smooth-faced boy—and now in that boy's place stood a man—and a man with murder in his eyes.

"It's the truth," she said falteringly—"It's the truth!"

Terence took a step forward, and stopped, his body crouched a little as if to spring, his hands shaking——

"If you were my father," he said in that soft, hard voice—"I'd kill you for that. By God, I'd kill you as you stand! But you're my mother, so I can't!"

"Terence—Terence!"

"It's a damned lie," he repeated slowly—"A damned, filthy lie!"

The Dowager gathered all her forces together for one supreme effort.

"It's not a lie! I have the proofs!"

Terence said nothing, but stooped and picked up the rose that lay on the path between them. With shaking fingers he started to pull it to pieces—one by one the scarlet petals fluttered down, lying on the cold stone like drops of dragon's blood.

"I have the proofs!" the Dowager repeated—"All Guy Wyndham's luggage was labelled to Purse Pomeroy—he went by the 10.10 from Paddington, three days after Deirdre did!"

"How do you know?" asked Terence, still pulling at the rose—the last of the petals fluttered down, bits of yellow stamens—last of all the green stalk and head of the rose, bereft of all its sweetness——

The Dowager went a dull red——

"I—I made it my business to find out," she said.

Terence's mouth sneered——

"You mean, I suppose, that you employed a detective agency to do the dirty work for you?"

"I—I had them watched, yes. I thought it was my duty."

Terence's smile was the perfection of insolence. If he could not hurt her physically, at least he could hurt her with his tongue.

"But how touching, my dear mater! And such a good idea! D'you know I wouldn't have thought of the detectives in a month of Sundays!"

The Dowager flinched a little.

"I got them to watch Deirdre's movements and Wyndham's. They were nearly always together while you were away. Even when you were at home they met secretly."

Terence's furious flush had faded—he was now very white, and his mouth was twitching——

"And you have been watching her too, haven't you? And then go and put a couple of dirty little detectives on their track—God, what a despicable, dirty thing to do! What perfection of petty, common spite!"

He meant to hurt her, and he succeeded. The Dowager was not without a certain pride of her own. Now she had no compunction.

"Everyone else saw that this would happen!" she almost hissed at him—"Everyone but you! All London is talking! Mrs. Vauxall——"

"Oh, I might have recognized her handiwork! You and she together—Lord, how you all must have cackled!" Again a leaping flame was in his eyes.

"I don't believe a single damned word of it!" he said deliberately—"You pack of infernal liars!"

"Terence!"

"You don't like me saying that? But you have brought it on yourself, you know."

He turned to go—the Dowager made one last desparing effort.

"Go and see for yourself! Take them unawares! Go down and see for yourself, you fool!"

He paused for a moment and looked at her with sheer hate in his eyes.

"Understand this—if it is true, or if it is not, which I don't for a moment doubt, I shall never forgive you for this—never, as long as I live."

His voice broke a little—he turned, and without a word left the rose-garden, with its clipped box, its bushes of York and Lancaster, Maiden's Blush, sweet damask, snowy white, dusky scarlet, blush pink, pale yellow tipped with flame——

The Dowager remained standing among the roses looking after him. There was something a little pathetic about her then. She had made her throw to ruin Deirdre, to turn Terence's love into hate, and she had lost. She remained standing there, staring, staring, until she saw the last of Terence's tall figure, until he vanished down the yew alley out of her sight. Then mechanically, she stooped and picked up the fallen rose petals that, bruised and tattered, lay on the path like drops of new-shed blood.

. . .

Terence Liscarney, after he had left the Dower House garden, took a short cut across the park to the big house. He walked very fast, and as he walked, he refused to allow himself to think. Instead he

whistled very softly between his teeth a habit acquired from school-days which he always used when excited, worried, or facing overwhelming odds. Terence Liscarney had whistled like that when leading his House fifteen to an unexpected victory against opponents who, owing to their size and speed, had been already hailed by public opinion as almost certain conquerors. He had whistled like that going out to bat for the 'Varsity, with his knees behaving in a treacherous way under him, and a sinking sensation in the pit of his stomach —later on when leading his bombers over the top on a forlorn hope at Ypres. And now Terence Liscarney, up against something tougher than he had ever before experienced, fighting desperately with his back to the wall—whistled. It was characteristically British—typical of the pugnacious, hard-fighting, hard-dying breed, that whistle in the face of a forlorn hope—He covered the ground very quickly with his long stride, and in a few minutes was at Greyfriars. He had motored down in the little Wolseley, which was drawn up outside the front door. He slipped on his overcoat and got in. The little car slid out of the big paved court, through the high wrought-iron gates, and down the long avenue under the leafy greenness of the chestnuts.

Once out on the London road Terence gave the Wolseley her head. Usually a careful driver, he seemed to cast discretion to the winds. And as the miles slipped away, he let the pent-up flood of his thoughts pour forth——

That it was true he could not, would not believe—

And yet little damning memories kept on stealing through his mind——

First of all, Deirdre's face when she met Wyndham at the opera—the whiteness of it, the strained, sick horror—Why was it that he had never noticed it till now?——

Now that he looked back on it all, it seemed to have been Deirdre and Guy—always Deirdre and Guy——

He remembered coming into the Water Garden and finding them sitting on the rim of the pool, speaking no word, just looking at each other silently——

Deirdre and Guy standing in the moonlit Walled Garden, she in her glittering black dress, her Spanish shawl—the icy coldness of her lips when he kissed them—and the way she had insisted on going away *alone*—without even Parker—and had refused to write to him or hear from him—Why?——

Last of all he remembered the strange expression in her eyes when she said good-bye to him at Paddington. And his own desolate feeling that, in some inexplicable way, he had lost her——

This last had worn off in a day, although at the time he had been vaguely disturbed by it.

But now every word, every action, had its own damnable significance.

God—if it should be *true!*

But it could not be—he tried to think of Deirdre's clear eyes, of Guy's loyalty and straightness——

The whole thing was wildly absurd, yet——

The hand on the steering wheel gripped so hard that the knuckles showed perfectly white. He sud-

denly realized that his forehead was wet, and clumsily groped for a handkerchief——

That night Terence dined in solitary state at 57, Clement Street, and afterwards looked out trains in a timetable. The 10.10 to Kingsbridge had been taken off, and the best train of the day was now the 3.27. He rang for his man——

"Pack a few things in a suit-case, Mackenzie. I am going to Devon to-morrow."

"Verra gude, your lorrd-ship."

Left to himself, he wandered upstairs and into Deirdre's bedroom. The place was in darkness, but he pressed a switch and instantly the yellow-shaded lamps flooded it with glowing light. The place looked deserted and forlorn, the big lacquer dressing-table bereft of its glittering tortoise-shell and gold and crystal, the bed innocent of snowy pillows or lace counterpane. There still hung on the air a faint wraith of the scent that Deirdre used—a subtle breath of violets. Terence stood looking all round him rather forlorn. He crossed over to the big wardrobe and flung it open. Inside hung a veritable rainbow of dresses, all on hangers, shrouded with tissue paper. He had seen Deirdre in all of them—they seemed somehow a part of her. There was a silver tissue one —a mist-blue chiffon sewn with moonlight sequins —a peach-coloured taffeta, the skirt slightly wired— a diaphanous thing of orchid tulle and silver net——

Terence shut the door with a crash, and went into the adjoining bathroom. The electric light glistened on pale green tiles, spotless enamel, the twin silver dol-

phins that would, on pressing a concealed button in their tails, belch forth water into the big porcelain bath. Here also it was rather deserted—the white shelves held nothing but a solitary crystal bowl that contained scented dusting powder. Suddenly Terence saw something which made an absurd lump come into his throat. Under a chair, apparently overlooked by Parker's eagle eye, lay, just as Deirdre had carelessly flung them, a pair of little gold embroidered satin mules, with frivolous tinsel rose-buds adorning them. To Terence's eyes they looked forlorn and pathetic, those little, gay shoes——

He picked one up, and stood turning it over in his hands. The absurd thing, with its high heel, its lining of soft rosy satin! He touched the rosebuds, the gold embroideries. This frivolous little slipper had had the honour of enshrining the rose and white of Deirdre's slender foot. Here her round, soft heel had rested—he remembered all at once how she had moved about the big bedroom in her fluffy negligees, her bare feet thrust into little heedless mules that flopped up and down as she walked—Deirdre! . . . Deirdre! . . .

Quite suddenly Terence crushed the little satin slipper to his cheek—a great sob shook him. . . .

CHAPTER XIV

"LOVE IS STRONG AS DEATH"

Song of Solomon

I

THE last day. . . .

They tried to pretend that it was just an ordinary day—one out of a hundred others. They bathed, and took a picnic to Gara Rock, and were so gallantly, piteously gay that they almost deceived each other.

Almost, but not quite. Even though their mouths laughed, their eyes gave them away to each other. . . .

And, miles away, Terence Liscarney was sitting in an empty first-class carriage, watching the flying scenery with dull eyes. He had not slept all night, and looked tired and very old. The smooth, boyish face was haggard—there were dark rings under the blue eyes. He picked up the *Morning Post* and tried to concentrate on the leading article, but quickly threw it down again. What a noise the train was making! It was singing a little tune as it hurried along—the Quaker Girl waltz——

"Pom pom pom, pom pom pom *POM!*
Pom pom pom, pom pom pom *POM!*
Pom pom pom, pom pom pom, *POM,* pom pom!
Pom pom pom, pom pom pom, *POM,* pom pom!"

It was making his head ache desperately. He took out his thin cigarette case, and was just extracting a de Reszke, when a piece of paper in the other side of the case attracted him. It was the drawing on the back of an old envelope that Gervase Wycome had made of Deirdre. Terence always carried it about with him as a talisman. He took it out and unfolded it. Deirdre looked up at him, smiling her brave, pitiful smile, with her long legs crossed in front of her, her slim hands clenched. Terence looked at it for a minute or two in silence. Then, his lips twitching a little, he put it back in his case——

"Pom pom pom, pom pom pom, POM, pom pom!
Pom pom pom, pom pom pom, POM, pom pom!" . . .

That infernal racket . . . Deirdre . . . Deirdre.

"Pom pom pom, pom pom pom, POM!" . . .

The day wore on to its close. It had been a beautiful day, they both agreed, smiling at each other with brave lips. Never had Purse Pomeroy appeared to them in such enchanting guise. The sun blazed down on the amber sands of the little coves, blue and lilac where the towering, jagged grey rocks threw their grotesque shadows. Away past Gara Rock the coastal hills loomed, burning with the heather's intense fire, covered with bracken whose greenness Autumn was already beginning to paint with patches of orange and leaf gold and purplish brown.

They had the cove to themselves all the afternoon. The only person in sight was a small urchin in a

scarlet jersey, splashing bare-footed over the wet sand, armed with a large shrimping net. He was slim and dark-eyed like a Sicilian fisher lad, and as he passed them he shouted a friendly greeting, with an accompanying flash of beautiful white teeth.

They bathed twice that afternoon. Deirdre loved the dark coolness of the cave where she undressed, and after it the sunshine, warm on arm and cheek and throat, the feel of the water closing round her as she dived. Guy dived too, off a flat, jutting-out finger of rock which raked forward about thirty feet above the water. It was a difficult dive, as the slightest miscalculation of time or spring might serve to dash the diver on the rocks beneath.

Deirdre, swimming lazily some way off, caught in her breath a little sharply as she watched the poised figure. He stood for a minute or two, then dived beautifully and with unerring judgment, his straight body cleaving the air like a knife. Deirdre breathed a sigh of relief, laughing a little at the tense anxiety with which she had watched him dive.

Afterwards they lay on the sands, silent for the most part, watching the hundreds of changing shades on the water. There were drifts of deep, luminous aquamarine and peacock, flecked with tiny racing white fingers of foam—there were shifting, shadows, cast by the clouds, of dim delphinium blue, and a faint violet that was hardly a colour at all—further out the sun caught it, and it became a shimmering sea of molten silver, shining like the scales of a beautiful serpent, glittering as if diamond dust had been scattered over it.

They watched a whole fleet of fishing-boats put out from the harbour and past the Bar into the open sea. The sun shone on their sails of tawny orange, and russet, and deep burnt amber—they looked like a handful of Autumn leaves on the water, Deirdre thought. One was a vivid scarlet, and that was a drifting peony petal—a blood-red blot on the silver sea. . . .

The afternoon died a lingering death. It was getting on for sunset when they strolled home along the cliff path, followed by a tired but jubilant Mr. Weller. They had nearly reached the white gate that led into the leafy lane, when Deirdre said suddenly——

"It's going to be a glorious sunset."

"Shall we wait and watch it?"

"Yes, I want to say good-bye here. It will be better than if we said it at Cliff Cottage, don't you think?"

"Much better."

Deirdre did not know whether she wanted to laugh or cry at the studied casualness of their voices. They turned off the narrow footpath, climbed the hill for some little way, then sat down among the heather. They were quite alone in their bloom-sweet eyrie—even Mr. Weller had rambled off by himself to investigate a porcupine-like clump of gorse. The only sounds were the tinkle of far-off sheep-bells, and the soft, plaintive soughing of the sea running into the little coves. Over the sea the dying sun was trailing his tattered banners of rose-scarlet and brazen gold, making the water look like a rippling sheet of flame.

As the two among the heather sat silently watching, the scarlet-sailed fishing-boat that they had seen put out from the harbour came round the point of rocks and sailed up the estuary. It seemed to have glided straight out of the sunset—its vivid sails were blood-red with the fiery glow. Slowly the lacquer red ball of the sun dipped beneath the horizon. Very slowly the brazen gold and tattered scarlet faded, merged into dim drifts of delicate primrose and faintest lilac and ethereal rose. Against this was one long cloud, like an enchanted galleon riding a faerie sea, the merest shadow of a thing—all soft greys and lavenders, gilded at the edges with gold. Above it was a strip of the purest, most exquisite blue, the colour of a robin's egg. All this gorgeous brocade of shifting colours and shadows was sewn with but one jewel—the first star, wan as an angel's tear against the opal sky.

"Oh!" breathed Deirdre. "Isn't it perfect?"

She sat leaning against the boy's shoulder, watching the gorgeous pomp and pagentry of the sun's funeral with wide, enraptured eyes.

Slowly the last lingering tatters of rose and lilac were fading. The robin's egg blue had merged into a soft silvery mauve. Night, the dead king's kinsman, started to drop the scented veil of twilight over the world. The wine-scarlet of the heather deepened to black, sea and sky took on the same dim shades. More stars appeared, one by one, jewelling the lavender gauze of the dusk.

Round the point came the rest of the fishing-boats, their Autumn leaf sails were drifting shadows on the

pearly sea. There were lanterns tied to the bows of each—they gleamed like topaz eyes, casting a pale gold reflection on the water. Up the estuary they sailed, past the foam of the Bar into the little harbour.

Then the rapturous glow died out of Deirdre's green eyes, like the sudden quenching of a flame.

"It's over"—she said in a small, flat voice. "Ended—the sunset and—our month."

One little month—strange that it should have held such a wide gamut of happiness and misery!

The girl suddenly turned to Guy with fierce, passionate rebellion. "Why should all things lovely come to an end? Oh, it's cruel—cruel! I'm sick—*sick* of being brave, and you are too, Guy. You know you are."

Up on the hill the heather smelt faintly sweet, mingled with the unobtrusive, clean tang of the bracken. . . .

She came closer to him—laid a hand on his arm. Through the dusk her face was moon-pale between the soft blackness of her hair. She looked oddly young and pathetic with her wet lashes, her childish mouth.

"You are going to Venice, are you not?"

"I start to-morrow." He could not trust himself to say much—the glamour of the night was tingling in his veins. He did not dare look down into the eyes raised to his—he loved her—ah, dear Lord, he *loved* her—and to-morrow he would be gone.

And Deirdre looked at him through drooping lashes. The sea was soughing plaintively, running into the ravines and gullies of the rocks with a peculiar sighing,

gurgling sound. Deirdre listened for a moment, then turned to Guy again. He was sitting with his arms round his hunched-up, long young legs. All her love rushed into her eyes for a second as she looked at him. She felt an overwhelming tenderness, and something else which she could not quite define—something fierce —passionate—vaguely evil. . . .

"You are going—to-morrow," she repeated slowly.

"Yes."

That vague something suddenly leapt from its lurking shadow—blazed forth in its terrifying power—smiled with its wicked scarlet mouth—beckoned and whispered and beguiled. Deirdre knew its name—it was called Temptation. . . .

Before, when it stirred in her she had not fully realized what it was. Now she knew what it was calling to her to do, and for a minute sick horror gripped her. Then Temptation was too strong—it conquered, trampling Honour and Courage and Self-Sacrifice beneath its soiled feet. . . .

"Take me with you to-morrow," said Deirdre Liscarney quietly.

There was a minute's tense silence, then Guy sprang to his feet, and stood looking down at her.

"You don't know what you're saying," he said roughly.

Deirdre got up too. She went up to him and laid her hands on his shoulders, looking him straight in the eyes.

"I know perfectly well," she said. "This is the crisis—I felt it coming.

"Guy, I am coming with you to-morrow. You *must* take me! I can't fight any longer—I'm not going to. By nature I'm more of a coward than a fighter, Guy."

She smiled a little at her own weakness. Guy was staring down at the moving topaz eyes of the fishing-smacks that broidered the dim aquamarine water. Deirdre, following his gaze, saw a mass of something dark floating on the ripples, half submerged, at the mercy of wind and tide. . . .

"Driftwood," she said, pointing to it.

"That's you and I and Terence—human driftwood, tossing along on the sea of Fate. It's a cruel sea, Guy. It seems to have no mercy—no way of escape. The currents are going to part us at last—you will be swept on one way—Terence and I another. I hate the sea—I hate it! It's cruel—it wants to suck you down! Look!"

Where the driftwood had been was only a stretch of heaving sea—the driftwood had gone.

"How cruel it is—how cruel and powerful! It frightens me—I want to escape it, Guy, take me with you to-morrow!"

She came and leant against his shoulder—he could feet the softness of her hair against his lips.

"Terence will forget—he's got Greyfriars to love—we've only got each other. I don't care what happens—we belong! You love me, don't you? I love you more than anything in the world. You shall take me with you, Guy."

He closed his eyes. For a minute Temptation had

come to him also, twining her soft arms round him, smiling her evil smile. . . .

Then quite suddenly he thought of Terence Liscarney. The gay eyes, the lovable ingenuousness, the friendship of him. Terence, the well-beloved, hero and friend of Winchester and 'Varsity days. . . .

"Will you take me?" asked Deirdre softly.

Guy drew a long breath. He looked at her for a minute, and no one ever knew except himself and God the fight it was to answer as he did.

"No," said Guy Wyndham.

There was silence for a second or two. Over the sea the moon had risen. It soared high in the heavens, dimming the lustre of the stars, and turning the water to a sheet of cold, passionless silver.

A solitary gull, skimming with a flash of white wings over the ripples, gave a sudden weird chuckle of coarse laughter.

And Guy, seeing the sudden anguished shame in Deirdre's eyes, said gently:

"Sweetheart, I want to tell you a story. Will you listen?"

"Yes," she said very low. He put his arm round her, and kept it like that all the time he was speaking.

"Once upon a time there lived a sort of Princefellow—the most splendid Prince you ever heard of. He was kind and generous-hearted and gentle to everyone. This Prince had a humble Knight in his train—not a splendid fellow like himself, but rather a poor

sort of Knight, who, nevertheless, loved the Prince with all his heart and soul. One day the Prince fell in love with a beautiful lady—they were married. The Knight had been away in foreign lands, and he came back to find that his Prince's bride was a lady to whom he had dared to raise his eyes, years before. To his mingled horror and joy he found that the lady returned his love—the Prince, of course, was too splendid even to dream of suspecting either his beloved Lady, or his favourite Knight. In his innocence he gave his wife into the Knight's care while he was away. He trusted them both—nothing in the world could shake his great faith. He loved the beautiful Lady—he loved the poor Knight. And he *trusted* in them. Deirdre, don't you see how utterly impossible it was for them, in their own selfish love, to ruin that trust? It would have broken the Prince's splendid heart. . . ."

Neither spoke for some minutes. They stood very close together, secure in a sort of understanding silence.

Far out beyond the churning Bar the sea lay gently heaving, glistening and shimmering like the skin of a snake, until it melted and merged into the dim hydrangea blue of the horizon. From a cottage in the valley came the sound of a man's voice, upraised in some sea chanty. Floating on the still air it lost any burred harshness, and became invested with a certain melancholy sweetness.

Then Deirdre looked at Guy with clear eyes, in which shone the light of something greater and finer than even Love.

"Thank you, Guy dear."

"You do see now, don't you darling?"

"I am horribly ashamed that I didn't see before. Forgive me, Guy."

"There's nothing to forgive, my dear."

They faced each other in the moonlight, simply and bravely.

"So this is good-bye. To-morrow you go to Venice."

"And you go back to Terry, dear. When you spoke of there being no escape from the sea of Fate, you were wrong. There *is* a way of escape for you—a harbour where no wave can touch or harm you."

"And that harbour is——?"

"Terry's love."

"I know"—said Deirdre very low.

Guy went on, speaking gently, as one would to a child.

"Make him as happy as you can, darling. He's worth all the love you are going to give him. He's white all through, is Terry—a very splendid Prince indeed. Make him very happy, Deirdre."

Deirdre suddenly flung out her hands in a little gesture of triumph.

"This is the end, but nothing can rob us of one thing—we've loved each other."

"Yes, we've *loved*. . . ."

For a minute they stood looking at each other, brave-eyed. Then suddenly their arms were round one another. In that one fleeting second Deirdre felt that they had entered at last the Palace Beautiful, which is called Courage. They seemed to have scaled to-

gether the topmost peak of the shining mountains of Love, and walked in glory on the "heights and rose-lit pinnacles."

"Good-bye, Dear."

"Good-bye, Guy."

The little white dog came bustling up. Deirdre picked him up and tucked him under her arm, then turned again to Guy. She said nothing, only smiled at him with brave lips, kissed him once more, and then was gone through the night.

The boy was left alone to the moonlight, the soughing of the sea, and the lonely splendour of fortitude. . . .

II

All night Guy Wyndham had not slept. He had lain staring into the darkness, hands behind his head, thinking of Deirdre, wondering if she was awake too, threshing out the problem of how happiness could be ensured for her and Terence.

"If I were out of the way," he muttered to himself—"it would be all right. Terence would make her happy—who wouldn't be happy with a fine fellow like Terry? She *must* be happy——"

He tossed and turned in the hot darkness, flinging off the bed-clothes, ruffling his black hair with nervy fingers.

"If I were out of the way——"

That was the only coherent note in the seething confusion of his thoughts. He never thought of him-

self once—only of Terence and Deirdre—Terence and Deirdre——

"It's no use going to Venice—she'll know where I am. She might even leave Terence and come to me, if things got too much for her. It's no use going anywhere abroad. While I'm alive she'll never be happy—never love Terence properly. If I were dead——"

Now the thought took shape and form and leapt out from its shadowy corner into the foreground of his brain.

"If I were dead——"

He sat up in bed, and clapsed his hunched-up legs round with long young arms, staring at the glimmering square of his window with bright eyes.

"It would be different if I were dead—I'd only be a memory to her. She wouldn't forget, but one can't love a memory as much as a living man. She'd be happy then—she'd get to love Terry as I want her to. And Terry would be happy——"

His eyes were very bright—his mouth was smiling ——

"If I were dead—it would be easy. . . ."

It was getting on for dawn. Birds were beginning to stir in the ivy outside his window. Slowly it grew lighter—a faint rosy flush began to tinge the eastern sky.

The boy got out of bed, hastily dressed in his every-day kit of flannels and college blazer. His bathing suit lay on a chair—every morning since he had come he had got up early and gone for a bathe. He picked it

up, rolled it up in a towel, and went softly downstairs through the silent house.

The sun had just risen, and was flooding the world with glory—"It's good to be alive!" thought Guy, and sighed a little to himself. A drowsy-eyed little kitchen-maid was just going downstairs, and gave him a soft "Gude daay, zur."

"Off for my morning bathe!" he told her, smiling, went on through the dark little hall, and let himself out into the garden of the Drake Arms. All the stocks and the marguerites, the salmon-pink gladioli and spiky dahlias, looked fresh and immaculate after their bath of dew, like little girls who have just had their faces washed. The fuchsia bush had had its hair combed by the wind, and was shaking out dangling purple love-locks.

Guy walked down the steps on to the jetty, where the ferryman and his little yellow dog were just preparing to go mackereling in a little motor-boat.

"Goin' baathin', zur? Ah'll take you 'cross t'other saide, if you laike. Where be yu goin'?"

"Gara Rock Cove, Ben."

"Gara Rock? In you get, zur—ah'll drop you there wi' pleasure."

Guy got in—the ferryman bent and started the engine, and the sturdy little motor-boat chugged out of the little harbour, down the estuary.

"Gran' mornin', zur."

"Absolutely topping."

Here was a chance to be clever, and cover up all the traces which Deirdre must never know. It must

appear to be a total accident—no shadow should mar the happiness he was planning for her.

"I shall be sorry to leave Purse Pomeroy."

"You goin', zur?"

"To-day, Ben. In a few days I shall be in Venice."

"Eh, tu be suure! Well, mebbe yu'll be baack soon, zur."

"Oh, rather—next summer, I hope."

That was good—the ferryman would report their conversation afterwards. And Deirdre would never know—that was good—very good——

"Fine morning for a bathe."

"An' a fine place tu bathe from—Gara Rock, though th' current is maighty swift paast the rocks."

"Oh, I'm a strong swimmer," said Guy lightly. "Here we are. Thanks for the lift, Ben."

He got up and jumped neatly on to the rocks, then gave the motor-boat a push out.

"Good-luck for the mackereling, Ben!"

"The saame to yu, zur. 'Ope you enjoy your swim!"

The irony of it nearly made Guy laugh. He watched the little motor-boat out of sight, then went into one of the numerous caves and undressed——

So far he had been clever—very clever. He had put all his clothes on a rock, neatly folded, as if waiting for him to don them again. He came out into the sunshine, felt it warm on his bare head and arms and legs——

There was nothing to indicate—*nothing*—that it was not more than an unfortunate accident——

Guy stood looking at the sea. It lay gently heaving —a smooth stretch of cold, passionless aquamarine, merging into dim drifts of pale turquoise, laced with delicate ruffles of white foam. Beyond the rocks the currents ran swiftly, ready to suck an unsuspecting bather to his doom. . . .

He started to wade in, then stopped abruptly. He could not feel the water creep up inch by inch, could not throw up his arms and let the currents drag him down——

It would be too ghastly. Looking up he caught sight of that jutting-out tongue of rock, hanging high above the water, from which he had dived the day before——

A-ah! The slightest miscalculation of time or spring would dash a man swiftly to death——

Guy started climbing the rocks, edged his way out to the very end of that cruel ledge of rock. For several minutes he stood there, looking down at the heaving green water beneath him. He thought of Deirdre and Terence, finding happiness together ——

Deirdre and Terence——

Guy raised his hands above his head. The sunshine was hot on his hair.

Deirdre—the green eyes of Deirdre———

He poised for the dive. The slightest miscalculation of time or spring—thinking of Deirdre, he dived. . . .

A swift rush through the air—then the sunlight blotted out—darkness—and splendour. . . .

III

Deirdre was in the little sitting-room of Cliff Cottage, trying to eat some breakfast, when she heard footsteps on the path outside—heavy, rather halting footsteps.

Aimlessly she wondered who it was. There was a knock at the front door—the Sealyham growled. Mrs. Dean went bustling out to open it. Deirdre heard her give a small, stifled scream, and then there was the murmur of voices—the sitting-room door flung open —Ben, the ferryman and a young fisherman stood there with a still, slight figure in their arms——

Guy——

Guy——

Deirdre got up from the table. She crossed over and stared at that calm, sleeping face. There was a bruise on his temples, like a mauve stain. He looked like a beautiful young wood-god felled to earth. . . .

Deirdre forced her stiff lips to say—"Dead?"

The ferryman nodded. There was evident pity in his keen blue eyes. "Ah took 'im over tu Gara for 'is baathe. Ah caame back tu tell 'im thaat ah'd taake 'im 'ome again afterwards. As ah caame round th' Point there 'e was, just going' tu dive off them rocks, an'—'e must a' slipped or summat——"

Suddenly Deirdre remembered her terror the day before when he had dived off that very rock—the way he had shot through the air like a swift arrow——

The men lowered their burden on to the couch. The young fisherman left the room, and Ben spoke.

"Ah thought yu'd laike me tu bring 'im here, Miss, 'stead o' th' Drake Arrms—you bein' his friend. No one knows yet 'cept me an' a mate o' mine—ah brought 'im in th' motor-boat, and carried 'im up the cliff path. My mate 'elped me. An' we'll keep our mouths shut, yu may be shore—yu doan't warnt 'em all nosin' round 'ere yet awhile."

"Thank you, Ben. I'll never forget what you've done," said Deirdre, wondering dully at her own calm.

The fisherman took her hand between his two strong brown ones. "Now, doan't taake on, will you, Missie dear? Ah've found that God never does anythin' like this wi'out haaving a reason o' some sorrt. Yu may not see it at first, but it's shore tu be there, all th' saame. 'Es a durn logical body, is th' Almightly, Missie."

And Ben, having squeezed her hand hard, turned and went. Deirdre shut the sitting-room door after him. She came back and sat down on the edge of the couch. For a moment or two she looked down at the boy's still, beautiful face. His faunish mouth was smiling as if he was in the middle of a very happy dream.

Deirdre looked at him silently. She did not want to cry—what was the use of noisy grief, when nothing would ever bring the light into those closed eyes again, or renew the leaping life in those long young limbs?

Guy was dead—Guy, so much the young god in his beauty and radiance that it had seemed impossible to her that he should ever grow old or die.

She had been right—he would never grow old. Age could not touch him now, or grief, or evil. He would

be for ever young—immortal—at one with things undying—the night, and the winds, and clouds—Immortal——

Truly he was blest. . . .

She noticed that he was still in his bathing suit, but Ben had wrapped a great coat round him. His thick black hair was glistening with water. Deirdre tried to dry it a little with her handkerchief. She kissed his forehead, where the bruise marred the brown skin—the chill of it smote her. It hurt her absurdly that Guy should be so cold—she slipped her warm arms round him and held him close for a minute. "Good-bye, my darling."

She kissed his smiling mouth.

"Good-bye——"

The Sealyham, who had been a disturbed spectator of all this, suddenly growled, and cocked his ears. Someone else was coming up the path, walking very fast, knocking sharply on the front door.

Voices in the hall, hurried footsteps, the door of the room flung open and shut again. Terence stood there looking at her across the still figure on the couch—Terence with his sleek fair head, his broad shoulders—Terence . . . it seemed rather funny that he should be there. Beyond that, Deirdre felt no surprise.

"I thought you were at Deauville," she said, quite naturally.

He did not answer, but came forward and bent over Guy's quiet figure.

"He—I—my God, he's not *dead?*" It is character-

istic of Terence Liscarney that he thought first, not of himself, but of his friend——

"This morning—an accident——"

"Dead? Jingle dead? Oh, rot!"

Terence's voice was angry. He bent over and gently shook Guy's shoulder. "Jingle! Jingle, old man! I say, don't rag any longer—Jingle——"

He straightened up, and stared at Deirdre with furious blue eyes.

"I don't believe it! Jingle isn't dead—he can't be —old Jingle!"

His voice suddenly faltered and broke. He looked at Deirdre piteously, then somehow stumbled to the wall, leant against it with his face hidden, and quite frankly, quite unashamedly, began to cry like a child.

Deirdre went over to him, and stood silently stroking his shoulder. She did not attempt either consolation or explanation. Presently Terry lifted his head. He was perfectly composed now, but his smooth boy's face was twisted and haggard and pitifully old.

He made a gesture at the still figure on the couch.

"You loved him?"

"Yes," said Deirdre quietly.

A tiny spasm of pain contracted Liscarney's face for a second.

Then he asked slowly:

"How long has this been going on?"

"Ever since I met him at the Opera."

There was a moment's silence. Terence looked at her wistfully. "I wish you'd told me, Deirdre. I hate to think that you didn't. It would have been so

much easier—I'd have understood—set you free at once——"

For the first time tears came into Deirdre's eyes.

"Why have you always been so good to me, Terry?"

"Because I loved you——"

"Loved"—the past tense hurt Deirdre somehow, although she knew it to be absurd. Of course he could not love her now that he knew—she had forfeited every claim to his love and trust——

"So my mother was right?" said Terence quietly—"You were down here with—with him?"

"I was coming back to you to-day," said Deirdre.

Terence turned on her sharply. She saw that he did not believe her.

"I am telling you the truth, Terry. My luggage is all waiting to go to the station, labelled to London. I did not know you were back—I was going to the Clement Street house to see that it was all ready for your—your welcome home."

"After being with him all the month?" said Liscarney. There was no trace of a sneer in his voice, yet Deirdre flushed scarlet.

"Terence, your mother has given you a wrong idea of things. I can explain if you—if you'll listen for a while."

Terence had walked over to the window, and was standing looking out at the sunny garden. He nodded curtly, without looking at her.

Deirdre began perfectly simply, without a trace of theatrical emotion.

"Just before I came down here Guy and I agreed

never to see each other again. People were talking—saying things which were utter lies, but which would have hurt you, Terry, if you had heard them. Guy came down to Purse Pomeroy a few days later to ask if we couldn't be friends, anyway, if nothing else. I said that it was impossible. I asked him if he wouldn't stay at Purse Pomeroy the month I was here, so that we could have a scrap of happiness together before he went away for good. Guy didn't want to—he thought it would be disloyal to you.

"I made him stop. I want you to understand, Terry, that it was all my fault—every scrap of it."

She looked at the tall figure by the window. He gave no word or sign, so she went on.

"We had our month—we were very happy. Last night when we said good-bye, I lost my head completely. I asked him to take me with him when he left for Venice to-day. If he had agreed, I would have gone with him. But Guy wouldn't. He showed me what a terrible thing I was going to do, and how dreadfully it would hurt you. I felt so horribly ashamed. So you see, Terry, that Guy was not to blame in any way. He behaved splendidly all the time—it was I who was such a—a coward."

Deirdre forced herself to go on.

"We said good-bye last night. To-day Guy was going to Venice—I was coming back to you, to make you happy, Terry, to—to try and make up to you for all the love you've given me."

Silence. No word or movement from Terry. Deirdre looked at him piteously. She moistened her dry

lips, and went on bravely. No one would have suspected from her voice that her mouth was all broken up with quivering.

"Of course I realize that it's impossible now. I—you needn't try to tell me. Why should you love me any more? I've cheated you—and you trusted me. I would have left you altogether if it hadn't been for Guy. No wonder you hate me."

If only he would say something—turn and look at her—strike her—anything but keep that cold, aloof silence. She felt that even his silence was charged with loathing.

"I won't worry you again, Terry. I shall go away—go to Mother at Mentone for a while. But I'll keep out of your way—you needn't see me again. We can get a separation at once."

Deirdre moved towards the door. She looked at the still figure on the couch, the tall, broad-shouldered figure of Terence, silhouetted against the window. The Sealyham was licking his hand, but he did not even stir.

"I won't ask you to forgive me," said Deirdre. "Because I know it's impossible. Even your generosity can't stretch as far."

She opened the door, hesitated, then looked back once more.

"I'm sorry—more sorry than words can say, that I've ruined your life so, Terence. Yours and Guy's—two beautiful lives that I've spoilt."

Her voice broke a little in spite of herself.

"Good-bye, Terence," she said, and turned to go out.

Courage—until you get out of the room . . . hold your head high . . . courage. . . .

Then Terence said one word very softly——

"Deirdre!"

Slowly, falteringly, she turned.

Across the room Terence Liscarney's arms were held out to her. . . .

THE END

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